

**Movement Territories and Logics from Below: The Struggle for Critical Collaboration in
El Salvador**

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In this thesis, I use ethnographic research methods to interrogate the understandings, practices, and demands of four distinct social movements on the left in El Salvador's novel political context in which the leftist Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) has been in control of the executive branch of government since 2009. I deploy the analytic frame of the "movement territory" to reflect the localized and territorially contingent understandings of my research participants, as well as to capture the similarities and differences across geographically, socially, and ideologically diverse spaces in which movements act. I find that Salvadoran movements have employed diverse modes of interaction with FMLN-controlled state institutions that can be divided into three tendencies: emergence, pacification, and critical collaboration. In broad strokes however, I contend that movements on the left have been weakened in the post-war period by a neoliberal state logic that contradicts a community-based logic from below based on historical movement traditions (typically associated with, and coordinated by the FMLN) of community organizing, social solidarity, and militant public mobilization. Neoliberal state logic has also led to epidemic social violence, massive emigration, and the "NGOization" of social struggle, factors which have further weakened movements on the left. Finally, the FMLN's assumption of state power itself, and its instrumental use of social movements, has served to relegate movements to a marginal status in the current context.

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PREFACE

I would like to thank the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) of the University of Pittsburgh for generous funding of the research that made this thesis possible. I am extremely grateful for the advice, suggestions, and critiques offered by John Markoff, Mohammed Bamyeh, Waverly Duck, Jackie Smith, Sebastian Cuellar, Sujatha Fernandes, Cesar Acevedo, and Rosie Ramsey which helped make this paper what it is. The errors and failings still remaining are of course my own. My most heartfelt thanks and love to my partner, Sarah Brinkman, whose patience and support (and technological assistance) is irreplaceable. Finally, I am forever indebted to the Salvadorans whose wisdom and insights form the basis of this work. I will uphold my promise to make a version of this thesis available to them. I hope that it meets with their approval and serves as a modest contribution to struggles to reconstruct Salvadoran, American, and global society.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

“In 2009, a new chapter of history was written for the country— a transcendental event. For the first time, the country would have a government from the left.”

(Armando Marin, Guarjila, Chalatenango)

Since 2009, the former guerrilla army-turned political party Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) has governed the tiny Central American country of El Salvador. The FMLN governments have institutionalized many “welfare-state” social programs, sought to combat corruption, and acknowledged the role of the Salvadoran state in past human rights abuses—seemingly a panacea for social movements on the left. However, the uneven effects of participation in the global economy, epidemic social violence, environmental destruction, and bitter struggles with the political right have constituted large obstacles to the FMLN’s objectives. Within this novel political context, I did field work in El Salvador during the summer of 2014 to interrogate the perspectives, practices, and objectives of Salvadoran social movements on the left, especially in terms of their relations with the FMLN as a party, and with state institutions in general.

Research Design and Movement Territories

My previous work and life experience in El Salvador had led me to hypothesize that many social movements on the left would be pursuing objectives related to broad conceptions of socio-economic justice bound up with the historical and contemporary FMLN project (dating from the Civil War of the 80's) to consolidate state power and expand state-based social programs. However, I had also encountered evidence that some organizations and movements were pursuing more autonomous social and political agendas that diverged from FMLN leadership. These dual narratives coincided with much literature on state/party-movement relations in Latin American that describe processes of confrontation, co-optation, and struggles for autonomy by movements once parties of the left attain state power.¹

My research design consisted of 22 interviews and 9 participant observations with “participants” in four social movement organizations (SMO's) that differed by their ideological underpinnings, geographic locations, and sector-specific agendas. In this way, I hoped to capture similarities and differences across distinct movements' interactions with state institutions administered by the FMLN. I also did five additional interviews with government and academic experts on the issue of interactions between social movements and the state in El Salvador. The SMO's I set out to research included the “District 6 Violence Prevention Team” in La Chacra, San Salvador, a coalition space working on the issue of violence prevention in their marginalized, urban community; the Association of Communities for the Development of Chalatenango (CCR), a historic peasant organization;

¹ There is a seemingly small but growing body of literature on dynamics between movements and leftist governments in contemporary Latin America. Chief among these are Ellner (2014), Zibechi (2011), Prevost, Vanden, and Campos (2014), Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, and Kuecker (2008), Ross and Rein (2013), Hylton and Thompson (2007), and Fernandes (2011). I look forward to putting my research into dialogue with these works in future iterations of this project.

Concertacion de Mujeres which struggles to defend women's rights in the semi-urban town of Suchitoto; and the Salvadoran Center for Appropriate Technology (CESTA), an NGO which promotes non-state centered environmental sustainability in rural communities, and whose work I investigated in the ecologically rich, yet fragile coastal region of the "Bajo Lempa".

Though my fieldwork consisted of researching Salvadoran SMO's on the left through their participants' perspectives, my process of data analysis has led me to deploy the concept of the *movement territory* as my primary unit of analysis for a number of reasons.² First, almost without exception, my interviewees conceived of their social and political actions in historic and territorial terms as opposed to the strictly institutional terms that would seem to derive from an analytic focus on SMO's. Thus a movement territory more accurately reflects my research participants' understandings and processes of sense making. Second, a movement territory encompasses specific communities and geographic features, local grassroots organizations, NGO's, state institutions, as well as specific ideological and social traditions and forces present in a territory. Thus a movement territory lens facilitates a historicized understanding of how movement traditions intersect with changing contexts to shape contemporary movement perspectives and practices in a given space. In my specific study, the movement territory enables us to see how more generalized or national characteristics of the Salvadoran left are in dialogue with geographically and ideologically informed differences across distinct territories. Finally, a movement territory allows for interrogating multiple movements in a territory and even those

² I am aware of the formulations of "social movement communities" by Staggenborg and of "social movement webs" by Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar. While both of these concepts are useful for understanding the overlapping loyalties and networks among social movement participants and organizations, neither of them capture the specifically *territorial* nature of the social movement activity that I observed in El Salvador. Nevertheless, I recognize that I may need to do more research in this conceptual realm.

social forces (such as gang networks in the case of El Salvador³) that would often fall outside the purview of typical social movement studies.

Summary of Findings

As a result of my fieldwork in these movement territories, I have three broad areas of findings. One group of findings reflects the widely held view among my research participants (especially movement “experts”) that Salvadoran movements on the left are weak in the current context, and explores the *causes of movements’ weaknesses*. In broad strokes, movement weakness results from the interactions between historical movement traditions and practices, and changing social, political, and economic conditions. These changing contexts include the political transformation of the FMLN’s arrival to state power, the uneven effects of El Salvador’s insertion into the global economy, and the resultant effects of this insertion such as endemic and epidemic social violence, massive emigration of Salvadorans to the United States, and the “NGOization” of social struggle⁴.

The second area of findings refers to a subset of the first area: movement reactions to the changed context in El Salvador’s political realm. In 2009, the FMLN took control of the executive branch through an alliance with political outsider and respected journalist, Mauricio

³ Gangs can be theorized in a number of ways: as involved in contentious politics (Tarrow), as non-movements (Bayat), as actors consolidating “territories in resistance” (Zibechi), or even as a sort of localized, or community-based state form. Unfortunately, this avenue of theorization is largely beyond the scope of this paper. Regardless, gangs are extremely influential in all facets of Salvadoran life at an empirical level.

⁴ There is a wide and varied body of literature on this contested phenomenon, with especially pertinent contributions from Sonia Alvarez on the NGOization of Latin American feminist movements (1999, 2009). While I briefly draw on Alvarez in Section 3 of this paper, I prefer to follow Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor in understanding NGOization as a process that professionalizes and institutionalizes social struggle by privileging knowledge and strategies within “alternative millieus” that tend to reproduce rather than challenge unequal power relations and elite interests (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013). This definition resonates with what my movement participants colloquially understand as SMO’s responding to their funders more than the interests and demands of their constituents.

Funes. In 2014, the FMLN again won presidential elections, this time with a member of its inner circle and former guerilla commander, Salvador Sanchez Ceren. The FMLN has since consolidated its power in subsequent legislative and municipal elections, vying to be the primary political force in the country. This political transformation has precipitated a series of interwoven though differentiated processes across social movements on the left, which can be grouped into three tendencies: pacification (an extension of instrumentalization/social movement partyism), emergence, and critical collaboration.

First, amongst those social movement organizations and coalitions that have historically been aligned or closely articulated with the FMLN, such as the CCR in the movement territory of Chalatenango, there has been a distinct process of *pacification*, whereby movements are no longer involved in contentious, public mobilizations, as their agendas have been adopted—in practice or in discourse—by the FMLN government.⁵ This pacification is the result of the FMLN’s historic *instrumentalization* of its aligned social movements for political and electoral ends in the post-war period.⁶ A sub-process of pacification that has occurred as the FMLN has assumed power is what I call—following my movement participants—*decapitation*, a process whereby movement leaders are made into state officials.⁷ In my view, both pacification and

⁵ Prevost, Vanden, and Campos (2012) understand “*cooptation*” to be the process by which a leftist government adopts or institutionalizes the previously oppositional agendas of social movements, thereby compromising movements’ autonomy and avenues for addressing demands. However, the imprecision of the definition of cooptation (see footnote 7) discouraged me from using it in this paper.

⁶ In a more laudatory analysis, Paul Almeida (2013) calls this dynamic “social movement partyism”, whereby a leftist party aligns itself with social movements to resist neoliberal policies in Central America. I unpack and problematize this concept in Section 2 below.

⁷ John Markoff informed me that what I call decapitation is often referred to as cooptation in other literature. This comment along with Sujatha Fernandes’ critique of an earlier version of this paper in which she suggested that cooptation is a generally vague and weak concept for conception of movement-state relations has led me to strike it from my paper.

decapitation fit into the post-war pattern of the instrumentalization of social movements by the FMLN.

Second, other movement territories such as La Chacra in San Salvador have seen the *emergence* of new movement coalitions such as the District 6 Violence Prevention Team, which coalesced in order to seek support and funding from the new FMLN government, as well as from NGO's and foundations that are financing the trending field of violence prevention. In this movement territory we thus see the emergence of a movement coalition based on economic (as opposed to political) opportunities, and in response to social threats of violence.

Third, the movement territories of the Bajo Lempa and Suchitoto are characterized (in my study) by the efforts of CESTA and the Concertacion de Mujeres respectively, to consolidate new iterations of relationships with the FMLN party and state institutions that are based on practices of *critical collaboration* in the words of the feminist activist Morena Herrera, one of the founders of the Concertacion de Mujeres. Herrera describes critical collaboration as movement participation in the formulation, implementation, and oversight of state policies without losing autonomy as a movement. While only Herrera used this term, it effectively captures the essence of the political priorities expressed by the institutional leadership of the Concertacion de Mujeres and CESTA, as well as the vision of *almost all* the research participants in my study, regardless of their movement territory or their affiliation with an institutionalized SMO.

This concept of critical collaboration leads to the third, and more theoretical category of findings. Namely, these variegated relationships of Salvadoran movements on the left with the FMLN party and with state institutions more generally, highlight the existence of two types of competing socio-political logics in El Salvador. One of these logics is that of the neoliberal

state, and emanates “from above,” while the other refers to a community-based logic that emerges “from below.”⁸

Neoliberal State Logic: Instrumentalization and Global Economic Integration

I would contend that El Salvador is a quintessential neoliberal state.⁹ For William Robinson (2008), the “neoliberal state” serves three functions: to ensure macroeconomic stability, provide the basic infrastructure for global economic activity, and maintain social order. This is an accurate definition of the Salvadoran state’s activities even as the FMLN has come to power¹⁰. The Salvadoran state’s neoliberal essence is primarily due to the way in which US-led international aid in the 80’s and 90’s ensured that El Salvador’s “democratic system” and socio-economic order were fully subordinated to the forces of global capital, such as the conditionings of the World Bank and the IMF, trade deals with the US, and global textile investment patterns. (Robinson 2003). In El Salvador, we thus see a situation theorized by many scholars¹¹, and usefully encapsulated by David Harvey in his formulation of the “state-finance nexus”, whereby the institutions of the state, and networks and functioning of capital are conceptually and analytically inseparable, as “state management of capital creation and

⁸ In section 1 of the paper I show how the gang networks constitute an additional “logic from below” that not only complicates my conceptualization of “logics”, but also the typical dichotomy between oppressors and oppressed.

While I find this concept helpful for my purposes in this paper, I acknowledge that it fails to capture the historical and cultural idiosyncrasies that would distinguish a specific state structure from others upon deeper investigation.

¹⁰ The FMLN’s implementation of social welfare programs should be understood as compliance with calls from International Financial Institutions’ (IFI) calls to strengthen a social order that was wrought by initial rounds of neoliberal restructuring. See Robinson (2008); 21-22, as well as my informal paper:

<http://www.panoramas.pitt.edu/content/conflict-and-consensus-el-salvador-contours-post-neoliberal-state>

¹¹ Tilly, Foucault, Habermas, James Scott, many World Systems scholars such as Robinson and Smith, and Central American empiricists explicitly or implicitly demonstrate that adequate understandings of either the state or capital are impossible without interrogating the way the two have interacted in their historical development and contemporary manifestations. This is a theoretical realm I would love to delve into, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

monetary flows became integral to, rather than separable from, the circulation of capital” (Harvey 2010).

Despite the seamlessness of the state-finance nexus in El Salvador as manifested in the neoliberal state, it is important to identify how characteristics of neoliberalism and the state converge to create a neoliberal state logic. In her work on urban social movements in Venezuela, Sujatha Fernandes’ follows Wendy Brown (following Foucault) to posit that neoliberalism is more than a set of economic policies that promote free trade, foreign investment, and export-led development. Rather, she sees “neoliberal governmentality” or “neoliberal rationality” as an extension of market rationality, based on the application of an instrumental calculus of economic utility to all state practices, as well as formerly noneconomic domains.”¹² Fernandes goes on to distinguish neoliberal rationality—with its emphasis on market penetration of social life—from liberal rationality with its emphasis on political incorporation through clientelist linkages. Fernandes bridges this gap by highlighting the “hierarchy and verticality that characterizes the instrumental approach of the state in certain moments.” By showing how the state draws on both liberal and neoliberal rationalities to employ an “instrumental approach” to governance, Fernandes leads us to an interrogation of state logic itself, a discussion I undertake in the specifically Salvadoran context I researched.

Given the subjugation of El Salvador’s political economy to forces of global capital, it would be untenable to think that the FMLN could have enacted any sort of drastic *structural* change upon assuming state power. Nevertheless, across the participants in the movement territories I studied, there was much satisfaction with the FMLN’s provision of social welfare

¹² Fernandes 2010; p. 22.

benefits during its two terms in the Salvadoran executive branch¹³, as well as its relative “openness”. However, across the movement participants that I interviewed and observed, there were intense feelings of separation and distance from the party—a sense of “being below” or even “inaudible” to those holding political power. On one hand, this maps onto findings that the FMLN’s postwar trajectory has led to disillusionment and inequality amongst its bases,¹⁴ as it has focused more on electoral concerns to the detriment of coordination with its grassroots bases (Almeida 2013, Villalona¹⁵). This type of emphasis exacerbated the process of stratification already at play within the party (Viterna 2013; Sprenkels 2015) as well as the tendency to instrumentalize social movements for electoral and political ends.

However, grassroots voices dissatisfied with their lack of meaningful participation in, and benefits from, the FMLN-controlled Salvadoran state also exemplify more theoretical understandings of state logic. For instance, in *Seeing like a State*, James Scott demonstrates how states “simplify” the characteristics of its subjects and territories in order to make them legible and controllable. Subsequently, states ignore authentic participation and localized, practical knowledge in order to impose abstract, simplified “schemes” upon its subjects in order to

¹³ These programs include the legal institutionalization of programs for supplies, uniforms, and meals for school children, pensions for the elderly, better and more localized health care services, and land titles for many communities. These measures have been widely popular and are often cited to vindicate the FMLN’s socialist credentials, though the political right has also supported their enshrinement into law. (See <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2014/04/04/funes-logra-elevar-a-ley-implementacion-programas-sociales>) There has also been a focus on rooting out corruption, recognizing the Salvadoran state’s role in past human rights abuses, fomenting transparency in state institutions, and constructing a more independent foreign policy. Some of these processes will be further addressed in subsequent sections of the paper.

¹⁴ The work of Ralph Sprenkels, a Dutch anthropologist demonstrates—among other findings—how the FMLN’s post-war demobilization was characterized by a process of stratification within the party that led to political and economic inequality among former comrades, which generated profound disillusionment in the grassroots bases. For a synopsis in Spanish of his findings regarding how the relations and imaginaries constructed by the FMLN during the war informs the party’s present see <http://www.elfaro.net/es/201504/academico/16843/> For the abstract of his dissertation in English see https://www.academia.edu/6321559/Revolution_and_Accommodation._Post-Insurgency_in_El_Salvador_abstract_in_English

¹⁵ Cesar Villalona, an economist with the popular education organization, Equipo Maiz, was one of my expert interviewees on Salvadoran social movements, and furthered this position despite his fervent support of the FMLN.

“improve their conditions.” Similarly, in *Anarchy as Order*, Mohammed Bamyeh shows how a state, by its nature, constantly seeks to expand its power in order to preserve itself and undergird its principle of “constant purpose” thereby undermining the “ordinary logic of civil life” based on practical management and independent networks of collaboration and communication.

So while the FMLN was always an extremely hierarchical institutional, its assumption of state logic—especially a state at the service of neoliberal accumulation—stands in stark contrast to its historical emphasis on “popular power” wielded from below by community organizations, with the FMLN as a coordinating body. My research suggests that as the FMLN has consolidated state power, its centralized practices of decision-making, the attempted incorporation of divergent forces into state-led processes, and the instrumentalization of movements for partisan or economic ends (often with movements’ cooperation) has become even more widespread. Ultimately, I contend that “neoliberal state logic” encompasses the confluence of market-led, hierarchical, and instrumentalizing forces that often characterize parties, state institutions, movements, and NGO’s in El Salvador—forces that are in dialogue, and conflict with El Salvador’s logics from below.

Community Logic as Story and Practice: Disinterested Social Struggle from Below

Though many of the recent “changing contexts” have seemed to weaken movements on the left in El Salvador, there are stories and practices that are pillars of the left (traditionally housed within the structure of the “historic” FMLN) that have remained relatively constant, and constitute the primary strengths of the movement territories I researched. These stories and practices hinge on the social traditions of relatively horizontal community organizing and

interpersonal solidarity as the basis of a localized “popular power” that has undergirded Salvadoran social movements on the left since at least the latter half of the 20th century. The contemporary core of these community-based notions of politics and power in regard to the state, according to the people I interviewed and observed, are their growing demands for direct, face-to-face relations of dialogue with state officials regarding territorial and national issues—especially FMLN state officials. Additionally, many of my movement participants expressed a distinctly rights-based justification of their fundamental demands, which included the “right to exercise rights” they already exercise (but are threatened with losing), or rights they are deserving of, given their status as right-bearing citizens.

In terms of their sector-specific issues and agendas, all the movement participants I interviewed were committed to making proposals and demands to state officials, and also to protesting so that they government will listen to them. The movement participants also expressed an understanding of community organizing as the key to dignity, respect and concrete achievements at the level of state policies, both in terms of maintaining what they have already achieved, and of building further on those bases. Additionally, these community logics and the practices that sustain them are interwoven with a “pleasure in agency” (Wood 2003) whereby peoples’ participation in social struggle in fact makes them “feel good”, regardless of the likelihood of success in their endeavors.

I found myriad examples for this dichotomy of logics throughout my data, and when analyzed in juxtaposition, it would seem that the logic of community organizing, face-to-face governance, and localized forms of production and learning is antithetical to the instrumental and centralizing logic of the neoliberal state. But my movement participants’ perceptions indicate that a critical collaboration that bridges the two in benefit of community interests (using the

resources, opportunities, and power of the state as tools for building “a more just society”) is possible and desirable. Thus, it is clear that community and neoliberal state logics are in dialogue with one another, constantly shaping one another within the complex understandings of movement participants as they are embedded in communities, SMO’s, and territories within a larger, globalized world.

Overview of Case Studies

In the following four sections of this paper, I will describe the movement territories in which I did research, the social movement organizations that were the initial target of my research, as well as the understandings of the movement participants that I interviewed and observed in each territory.¹⁶ In order to complement the analysis of cross-movement similarities posited above, these ethnographic accounts demonstrate how localized cultural, historical, and political factors generate *divergences across territories* in terms of Salvadoran movements’ perspectives, practices, and demands toward state institutions, and the FMLN as a party.

I begin with a discussion of La Chacra and the District 6 Violence Prevention Team. This section includes a brief historical account of El Salvador’s civil war and transition from authoritarianism and a traditional oligarchic economy to liberal democracy and a neoliberal insertion into the global economy in the context of civil conflict in the 1980’s and the peace process of the early 90’s. I also describe how this process of neoliberal transformation created new forms of poverty and survival networks while also prompting massive emigration of Salvadorans to the US. These processes and conditions converged with the deportation of Salvadoran gang members from the US to create an explosion of social violence in the 1990’s

¹⁶ In the conclusion, I include further methodological reflection regarding how my findings can be categorized into cases, as well as what they tell us about Salvadoran social movements more generally.

and 2000's. I also explore how this violence often derives from another “logic from below”—that of the gang networks—which is in dialogue and conflict not only with neoliberal state logic, but also with community logic throughout El Salvador.

In the third section I discuss the movement territory of eastern Chalatenango where the CCR, a historic peasant movement closely articulated with the FPL of the FMLN, is the primary social movement organization. Here, I problematize Almeida's concept of social movement partyism as I trace the trajectory of the CCR from the Post-Civil War period to the present — with a special emphasis on current contradictions among militants of the FMLN in this movement territory.

The fourth section of the paper focuses on the movement territory of the semi-urban colonial town of Suchitoto and its surrounding communities where the Reistencia Nacional (RN) faction of the FMLN was most prevalent. I focus on the Concertacion de Mujeres, an SMO whose holistic attention to defending the rights of women in the area of Suchitoto not only provides an important “gender lens” (Brush 2003) to my study, but also forms the conceptual and empirical framework for the concept of critical collaboration which cuts across my case studies.

The fifth section of this paper explores the perspectives and practices of movement participants in the Bajo Lempa movement territory. Primarily populated by ex-members of the Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) faction of the FMLN, in this territory we see the most pronounced dispute between neoliberal state logic and logics from below as a mega-tourist project funded by the US and administered by the FMLN-led Salvadoran state threatens to drastically reconfigure the rich ecosystems and community life of this fragile territory. An analysis of this environmentally-based struggle provides a fitting (if foreboding) conclusion for thinking about the FMLN government's newfound emphasis on “citizen participation,” and the

nature of interactions between the neoliberal state and Salvadoran social movements in specific movement territories.

2.0 “LET THEM COME DOWN”: VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND LOGICS FROM BELOW IN A RED ZONE OF SAN SALVADOR

As I turned off the Bulevar Venezuela and started down the steep entrance of “El Coro”, I got my first glimpse of La Chacra in over a year. I hadn’t been gone so long from this urban outskirts of San Salvador, El Salvador in the previous seven years¹⁷. From El Coro, you get a sense of the geography of La Chacra. In essence, it is a gaping hole that is scarcely visible from the busy streets that form its western and northern borders. Upon descending into La Chacra from El Coro, you can see the River Acelhuate—foaming white and brown with industrial and human refuse—bisecting the basin from south to north. Occupying the river’s steep banks are tin, wood, and concrete houses that are so closely stacked upon one another that they largely obscure the narrow streets and alleyways that weave amongst them.

Most estimates put the population of La Chacra at about 30,000. The area is comprised of 23 communities and covers about two square miles. La Chacra is located at the extreme southeast corner of San Salvador, with neighboring urban municipalities just beyond it in every direction, except to the south, where there is a lush corridor of hillsides. It is colloquially known as a marginal community, or as a “red zone” in the public security-inflected language that

¹⁷ I lived and worked in El Salvador for five and a half years, from 2006-2012. In the first three years, I worked with two transnational solidarity organizations, the SHARE Foundation and the Volunteer Missionary Movement. For the last two and a half years I worked in La Chacra with the Maria Madre de los Pobres parish. I then have returned to visit frequently since living in the US again.

increasingly permeates everyday conversations. A red zone in El Salvador is understood as poor, violent space usually controlled by gangs. In the case of La Chacra, this is an accurate description. However, there is much more at play than violence and gangs. The inhabitants of La Chacra have developed complex ways of life that facilitate survival, meaning, and diverse strategies to shape their reality.

In this section, I interrogate how participants in a coalitional space for violence prevention—a community effort to provide alternative opportunities to young people at risk of committing acts of violence—make sense of their social and political activity in La Chacra. What are the processes of micro-(de)mobilization that occur in this movement territory? What are the forces of social, economic and political order? How do community and social organizations interact with state institutions and the parties that administer them? Before delving into the answers to these questions, I first briefly and reflexively situate myself in the La Chacra. I then outline the broader history that has created the tension between neoliberal state logic and logics from below in La Chacra, a tension that I contend, defines the parameters of collective sense making in the territory.

“Whether by Love or Fear”: Criminalization, Continuity, and Change in Red Zones

During my two and a half years working to varying degrees in La Chacra’s local Catholic parish Maria Madre de los Pobres (Mary Mother of the Poor), I helped out on myriad projects in the parish, but found a niche in the reactivation and administration of a violence prevention program called the Open School. The equivalent of an after-school program, the Open School sought to offer recreational, educational, and cultural activities to kids in the area as a way of keeping them off the streets in the afternoon. I spent a lot of time in the communities of La

Chacra—visiting the families of kids who came to the Open School, hanging out with friends, and participating in community activities. I even lived in one of the communities (by myself) in a one room, tin-roofed shack for almost a year. But I primarily spent time within the parish grounds itself, which although it was organically integrated into the communities, had its own aura of support and serenity, which all were welcome to enjoy, even the gang members.

The gangs of El Salvador originated in Los Angeles but are one of the defining forces of the “red zones” of El Salvador. The two primary and competing gangs—the 18th Street Gang (18) and the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)—are closely knit groups of boys and men (though there is a small minority of female members) who have organized into cliques that control sections of territory in poor, urban spaces such as La Chacra, from where they conduct extortion and drug trafficking operations backed up by threats and practices of violence—primarily homicides. These localized cliques are part of a transnational, and extremely hierarchical network that, in El Salvador, is run from the country’s prisons.

Given the poverty and lack of socio-economic opportunities in La Chacra, I contend that gangs occupy a relatively respected position relative to other territories where gangs operate in El Salvador. Salvador. In general, gangs seek to not harm the inhabitants of the territories that they occupy, though their disputes with one another sometimes leave non-gang members as victims. But equally important for my purposes in this paper, gangs in La Chacra provide a source of status, power, income, community, and belonging to their members—elements of social, cultural, and economic capital that are hard to come by in this territory. Even non-gang members feel a sense of belonging, and sometimes perceive income and security benefits from their resident gang clique. However, it is a complex and ambiguous relationship between community members and gang members who share a territory, not to mention family, friends,

and walls (given the extreme proximity of houses). As one non-gang member resident of La Chacra once told me: “whether by love or fear, we are with them (the gang members).”

Nevertheless, inhabitants of La Chacra tend to agree that they, and people in other red zones, suffer a deficit in quality of life as a result of inter-gang violence and various “outside” responses to this violence. First, residents are in constant danger of being the “collateral damage” of directly gang-inflicted violence. Second, the state has criminalized red zones as territories, and all inhabitants within them. This criminalization entails state security forces—such as police, military, and “Specialized Gang Task Forces”—periodically (or permanently, depending on the red zone) militarizing specific red zone communities. Militarization results in extra-legal detainment, searches, and mistreatments of individuals, as well as raids of private residences under the pretext of searching for gang members. Third, residents of red zones are stigmatized outside their communities by the wider Salvadoran society. The most egregious material result of this stigmatization is that residents of La Chacra are routinely denied employment given their community of origin. For this reason, many inhabitants of La Chacra conceal where they are from so as to not be labeled a gang member or sympathizer.

I had prided myself on almost never being “scared” when in La Chacra. To Salvadorans who did not live there, just the name La Chacra evokes fear given its notoriety for violence since the late 90’s. But I had enjoyed a type of immunity from the gangs given my “sacred” or “protected” identity as a worker at the parish. But as I now walked through the streets of La Chacra for the first time in a year, I felt slight pangs of doubt. First of all, I had changed from a good-hearted solidarity activist to a “researcher”. Second, while La Chacra had always been dangerous, there were now new sources of violence emerging. On one hand, the government-brokered truce between the two primary gangs—which had reduced homicides by two thirds

from 2012-3—had fallen apart (see footnote 26 below). Furthermore, the 18th street gang, which controlled the majority of the communities of La Chacra, had divided into two rival factions—the Revolucionarios and the Surenos—due to the type of power struggles and economic competition that had previously only existed between the 18 and the MS-13. Finally, all gang members were now in open war with the police and military. I had been warned that shootouts between gang members and state security forces were now just as likely as shootouts between rival gangs themselves. So as I now made my way through the alleyways, saying hello and giving hugs to acquaintances and friends, I was on the lookout for new signs of conflict. None were apparent.

I walked across the eroded bridge over the River Acelhuate into the community of San Luis II, where I would visit my old friend and coworker, Yanira Monjaras to catch up and get her take on my research ideas. Smart, industrious, eloquent, and the director of the parish health clinic, she was one of the leaders in the parish and the community. The primary way I am familiar with the history of the area is through the words of women like Yanira as they spoke to international delegations that came to visit the parish.

Servicing the Poor: War, Liberation Theology, Neoliberalism, and Gangs

While a few small “formal” neighborhoods had existed in this area since the 1950’s, the majority of La Chacra’s human population arrived in the early 1980’s as internal refugees of El Salvador’s brutal civil war. Beginning in 1980 and ending in 1992, the armed conflict between the leftist guerrilla army Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Salvadoran military state (with preponderant backing from the Reagan-led US government) claimed 75,000

lives and displaced an additional 1 million.¹⁸ As the lion's share of the fighting occurred in the mountainous countryside, many rural inhabitants fled to un- or under-used land in the outskirts of San Salvador where they were able to set up makeshift dwellings and attempt to access aid from international churches and organizations. Such is the origin of La Chacra. Many of the zone's older residents tell tales of fleeing massacres and bombs in the countryside, only to arrive to filth, destitution and marginalization in the outskirts of the "city"—which in the case of La Chacra, was little more than a series of vegetation-covered hillsides and ravines that was never meant for 30,000 people.

However, by 1984, a group of international priests and nuns, as well as local laypeople inspired by Liberation Theology,¹⁹ inaugurated the Maria Madre de los Pobres parish as a way of formalizing their provision of basic social and pastoral services to La Chacra's refugee population. Throughout the late 80's and into the 90's, the parish facilitated processes of community organizing, infrastructural development, and basic service delivery that have continued into the present as primary sources of social welfare in La Chacra.

However, not all of the Salvadorans who fled the Civil War of the 80's ended up in marginalized communities such as La Chacra. Those who had sufficient economic or social capital sought refuge in other countries such as the United States, and even more specifically, in metropolitan areas of California such as Los Angeles and San Francisco. Here, young Salvadorans were exposed to the discriminatory racial frames of US society, the racialized criminalization of police officers, and the aggressions of Black and Latino gangs

¹⁸ Montgomery (1995). See pp. 102-148 for detailed descriptions of the mass-based and political military organizations that comprised the FMLN; See pp. 213-263 for an account of the impacts of the war and the Peace Accords that brought it to an end.

¹⁹ Liberation Theology espouses a theory and practice of a "preferential option for the poor", as a distinctly Latin American interpretation of the Catholic Church's modernizing attempts during Vatican II.

the marginalized spaces of urban California. In this adverse yet conditioning environment, Salvadoran youth began joining local gangs, especially the 18th Street Gang (named for 18th Street in South Central Los Angeles) and even formed their own specifically Salvadoran gang: the MS-13.

When the Civil War in El Salvador came to an end in 1992, those Salvadorans who had enjoyed political asylum in the US but who had accrued criminal records, were deported back to their country of origin. Many of these deportees were members of the 18 or the MS-13. Thus, budding Salvadoran gang members brought US gang culture to the poor, over-crowded slums of San Salvador which were just now consolidating as formal neighborhoods—in the immediate aftermath of war, and just as the impacts of neoliberalism were being felt.

The right wing National Republic Alliance (ARENA) political party had taken power in 1989 and through the course of the 1990's and 2000's oversaw a sweeping implementation of privatizations, elimination of tariffs and subsidies, promotion of maquiladora textile factories, and investment deregulation. The neoliberal model was entrenched with the adoption of the US dollar as the national currency in 2001, and the signing of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the US in 2005. These structural transformations had devastating impacts on the Salvadoran economy and social fabric. As El Salvador became more integrated into global circuits of production and accumulation, small-scale agriculture as well as public employment became unviable, causing increases in poverty, unemployment, and emigration to the United States.²⁰ Many Salvadorans were forced to rely on the vagaries of the “informal sector”, where people bought and sold goods in open-air markets that fell outside of the formally regulated economy. According to the UNDP, by 2007, 43% of the Salvadoran population

²⁰ For in-depth analyses of the implementation of neo-liberalism in El Salvador and its impacts see Antillon (2005) p.1- 31; and Acevedo (2000)

participated in the informal economy.²¹ Yanira estimates that in La Chacra, around 2/3 of the population has no formal employment, and eke out a living in the informal sector.

A component of the informal sector that is often ignored as such, yet should be included conceptually, is the network of competing gangs. Gang competition (again mainly between the 18 and MS-13) over drug and extortion routes had led to epidemic levels of violence by the early 2000's. By 2013, El Salvador was the most violent country in the world in terms of homicides per capita with 41 homicides per 100,000 people. From the 90's and through the 2000's, the ARENA-led state responded to gang violence with *Mano Dura* (Heavy Hand) security policies, which involved generalized criminalization, mass incarceration and indiscriminate repression of suspected gang members.²² In response, Salvadoran gangs became more clandestine in public, more brutal in tactics, and ensconced their leadership structures within the prisons.²³ The "sustainable" industry of prolonged extortion became their crime of choice, and after 2006 they became more involved in transnational drug trafficking as Mexican cartels moved logistical operations into Central America. The Salvadoran case thus further substantiates much relevant literature (Rios 2011) in demonstrating that blanket policies of criminalization and incarceration inextricably lead to increased levels, and more sophisticated forms, of crime and violence by criminalized groups.

When I got to Yanira's house we caught up for a good deal of time before I told her about my research project. She soon convinced me to change my object of study from the grassroots

²¹ Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD). *Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano, El Salvador 2007* (San Salvador, 2007) p. 54 <http://www.pnud.org.sv/2007/idh/content/view/25/101/>

²² Wolf, Sonja. "El Salvador: Debatando el Papel de los Militares en la Seguridad Publica," 2012: *Distintas Latitudes*. <http://www.distintaslatitudes.net/el-salvador-debatando-el-papel-de-los-militares-en-la-seguridad-publica>

²³ Valencia, Roberto. "The Country that Handed its Prisons Over to its Gang Members," *El Faro*, 2015. <http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201408/cronicas/15861/El-pa%C3%ADs-que-entreg%C3%B3-las-c%C3%A1rceles-a-sus-pandilleros.htm>

coordinating body of the 23 communities of La Chacra, known as the Inter-Comunal (The Inter-Communal Board) to the emerging “District 6 Violence Prevention Team” which was comprised of representatives from churches, schools, and community boards that had coalesced to work on a “Violence Prevention Plan”. The zone-wide plan would be presented to the national government, as well as to national and international NGO’s to attract resources to the zone for violence prevention work, given the fact that according to Yanira, the new FMLN government, was promising to support violence prevention work in the communities. Furthermore, there would be meetings that I could observe and participate in, and the group could benefit from my help.

The Realities, Discourses, and Commodification of Violence (Prevention)

I went back to la Chacra a few days later to attend the meeting of the Violence Prevention Team. I found that although the space had initially included many members of various churches and community directives from the zone, a large portion of these people had dropped out of the effort. There were now eight people at the table and most of them were associated with the parish, with the local Catholic school structure—Fe y Alegria (Faith and Joy)—or the nearby communities. The newest and most salient absence at this particular meeting was of the representatives of the communities of La Quinonez I and II, on the other side of the river. Though meeting attendees noted the *absence* itself of these community members, they did not speculate as to *why* they had stopped coming.

The meeting attendees had already been working on the written proposal for their plan for violence prevention work funding for about five months. At this point they were striving to make as few change to the document as possible, despite the contributions of a young member of

the Youth Pastoral Team who wanted to include police abuse of young people as a “a source of violence that should also be prevented”. The rest of the meeting attendees—all adults—discussed this idea, but decided against including it in the plan, primarily because they wanted to “strengthen the community” in order to deal with the violence perpetrated by the gang members. They felt there was little that they could do about the ubiquity of state security officials’ abuses of young people in a red zone.

However, the meeting attendees highlighted the (potentially discouraging) fact that none of them—or their organizations—had experience actually working directly with the “muchachos”—a reference to the gang members, though with the word for “boys”²⁴. While this distance from gang members may have seemed antithetical to their violence prevention purposes, I contend that it derived from the inaccurate mainstream discourse around violence in El Salvador that demonizes gang members, almost exclusively imputing all violent acts to them.²⁵ The discursive demonization of gang members, the often unsavory direct interactions with gang members that members of the Violence Prevention Team had experienced, and their desire to “strengthen the social fabric” by working with youth who were not *maleado* (made evil) by gang participation, coalesced to impel them to dismiss the possibility of working directly with the muchachos.

²⁴ Using the terms, *marero* (for the MS-13) and *pandillero* (for the 18) can be dangerous as the utterance of a specific gang’s preferred identifying term in the presence of a member or sympathizer of the rival gang is grounds for violent retaliation. Most people have thus struck these terms from public transcripts.

²⁵ Mounting evidence indicates the existence of much drug trafficking violence, as well as the existence of social cleansing/death squad activity against gang members, or those perceived to be gang members, as well as against social and political activists, and the LGBT community. I would estimate that gangs are responsible for around half to 2/3 of homicides in El Salvador especially considering the way homicide rates vacillated around the time of the truce, and with gangs’ growing involvement in drug trafficking. See <http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201503/cronicas/16490/La-Tregua-redefinió-el-mapa-de-asesinatos-de-El-Salvador.htm>

At a national level, the discursive demonization of gang members runs parallel to their legal criminalization and physical repression that, while initiated under ARENA governments, has only increased under the FMLN. In 2009, Mauricio Funes' administration enacted a total militarization of public security through the permanent deployment of the military into El Salvador's "red zones" such as La Chacra. Interestingly, this came alongside Funes' clandestine facilitation of a gang truce that reduced homicide rates by about two thirds between 2012 and 2013.²⁶

As President, Sanchez Ceren has greatly intensified the repression of gangs²⁷, but has combined repression with a strong discursive commitment to the type of violence prevention programs that were included in the Violence Prevention Team's plan:²⁸ job fairs, employment training, the operation of computer labs, sports leagues, training in arts, crafts, theatre, and other cultural activities. However, the proposals for *community organizing-based* violence prevention solutions, such as those that the people in La Chacra were positing, are rare. The participants in the Violence Prevention Program "knew their communities", and all the work and people at play therein. They felt that they could be the "glue" sticking violence prevention work together in the zone. In the words of Yanira, the Violence Prevention Plan was a dream where through

²⁶ Funes' has still never admitted his knowledge or involvement in the facilitation of a truce between the two main gangs whereby the government made direct payments to gang leaders, improved their prison conditions, and made promises for long-term support for generalized rehabilitation and reinsertion of gang members, in exchange for a lowering of homicide rates. See <http://www.elfaro.net/es/201203/noticias/7985/> As Funes got to the end of his administration, the truce fell apart, ostensibly due to a lack of government follow through on the long term conditions of the truce.

²⁷ State security forces have recently received the green light to kill suspected gang members without fear of reprisals, and perhaps not coincidentally, March 2014 was the most violent month El Salvador has seen in over 15 years; see <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/06/el-salvador-violence-end-to-gang-truce-proves-deadly> State security forces committed a whopping 30% of these March homicides with the ostensible victims of course being gang members; see <http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201504/bitacora/16828/?Vamos-a-la-guerra.html>

²⁸ See <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/01/trying-end-gang-bloodshed-el-salvador-20151197230531747.html>

“entrepreneurship, spiritual formation, strengthening of the social fabric, and accompaniment, young people—and the family—can be a contribution to society, and not a burden.”

The case for people like Yanira and others on the Violence Prevention Team to manage community-based processes of violence prevention is solid. At the same however, just like the larger NGO’s, foundations, and state institutions, the participants in the Violence Prevention Team were essentially instrumentalizing violence and violence prevention, a type of NGOization of social struggle. This phenomenon was perhaps most evident in the text of their document itself, where the opportunities section of their proposal simply contained a list of their possible sources of institutional financial support. This indicated that the group understood its work around violence prevention to hinge on the obtainment of funds. The necessity of funds is not to be downplayed, but the salient theme is how violence prevention was a powerful frame in the emergence of proposals for financially based social action.

That night, Cesar Tellez, a taxi driver who is also a member of the community La Quinonez II and a participant in parish activities, gave me a ride out of La Chacra. He had also been one of the representatives from his community who had stopped attending the Violence Prevention Team meetings. During the half hour ride to the other side of San Salvador, he told me about recent acts of violence in his community, which included the killing of a young gang member by his “higher-ups” for “getting out of line,” and also a shootout between the local 18 clique and the police which had left three of the “muchachos” wounded and one dead. Cesar also shared the “secret” that he and others in La Quinonez I and II had been directly threatened by “high-up” (leader) gang members in their communities to not participate in the Violence Prevention effort. Cesar’s analysis was that the gangs thought that the violence prevention programs could potentially impinge upon their extortion racket given that extortion is contingent

on the threat and practice of violence. If violence were to somehow be “prevented” gangs would have more trouble collecting their extortion quotas. In my view, it is also possible that the gangs sought to stymie the prevention efforts so as to halt further incursion of NGO’s and state institutions into their area as a way of maintaining their territorial control. Whatever the reasoning behind the gangs’ threats, Cesar and other community leaders reasoned that obedience to the gangs was clearly more advantageous than an investment in the potential long-term success of the Violence Prevention project.

“Let Them Come Down”: A Red Zone’s Community Relations with the FMLN and State Institutions

In my subsequent interview with Yanira, we talked about her role as the president of the local community directive. She explained that the primary purpose of the community directive—in her community, and in others—was to deal with local community needs such as basic services and infrastructure, as well as serve as the referent for other “larger” organizations such as the Inter-Communal Board, which brought together representatives not only from the 23 communities that belong to the “zone” of La Chacra, but also from another 10 communities that comprise District 6 of San Salvador. She assured me that, in her community, they paid their taxes and were intent on pressuring the municipal government to spend the money on programs of social benefit because otherwise “they will spend it on other things or just let it sit there.” She thought this was the case because ARENA was currently in control of the municipal government of San Salvador.

I tried to get her talking about how violence impacted organizing in the communities, though she seemed uninterested in the topic. Instead, she sought to orient the conversation away

from violence and toward things such as employment, which she saw as a *solution* to violence, and toward family disintegration, which she saw as a primary *cause* of violence. But in response to a question as to whether or not violence could be an obstacle to organizing she responded, “It depends, because yes, there is fear... there is fear. The people... hear something and then they think that it’s better to abstain, to not participate.” With her and others on the Violence Prevention Team, I noticed a distinct aversion to speaking directly about violence and an inclination toward highlighting the necessary steps to combat it. This suggested a generalized goal of using the Violence Prevention Plan as a way to combat La Chacra’s stigma as a “red zone”.

Eventually, when I asked Yanira what she wanted most from the new FMLN government, she responded: “Let them come down.” She wanted them to come to really understand the reality, and to work together with them, face-to-face, to find and implement solutions to violence and poverty in La Chacra. Deysi Valdez, the President of the Intercomunal, and Jorge Ramirez, a longtime FMLN militant and member of the Violence Prevention Team, also echoed this sentiment in almost the same words—that in La Chacra, they needed outside/state authorities to “come down” to them. This implies that current policies (or the lack thereof) being implemented by government and non-governmental institutions in La Chacra come from outsiders who don’t understand what’s happening on the ground. However, “an advance” in this sense according to Yanira, was with the new health promoter’s office “was implemented right here in the zone. Because where the health clinic had been before... the people from here couldn’t go there because...because of the gangs... So one of those things that we struggled for was for it (access to health care) to ‘come down’, and that was achieved with the government of the FMLN.” So for Yanira, this demand that the state institutions “come

down” and implement solutions based on communities’ realities (such as gang territory lines) was not an unattainable dream, but one where there are precedents to build from.

Another important facet of relations between the communities of the movement territory of La Chacra and state institutions revolves around the process of what has been traditionally called political clientelism, though in El Salvador one hears the term *asistencialismo* to refer to organizations (parties and NGO’s especially) who give “hand-out” forms of assistance to their beneficiaries or clients. While Yanira thought it was the right wing ARENA who was most responsible for giving residents things like tin roofing sheets and baskets of goods in “understood” exchanges for votes, she also thought “all the parties” were involved in this type of practice of “using the communities in times of electoral campaigns.” However, she proceeded to distinguish the FMLN from other parties saying: “...the FMLN is more of a party that prioritizes community organization, and that the person develops holistically—that they have their needs satisfied, not just a palliative dealing with necessities... they are about demanding what has to be demanded.” Though she proceeded to provide examples of FMLN functionaries “coming down” such as the legislative deputy of San Salvador meeting with the Intercomunal, and the frequent visits and follow up on projects of Gerson Martinez, the Minister of Public Works, she again reiterated that politicians only come as representatives of their parties, and not as individuals who are willing to work with the people.

Yanira’s analysis of the discourses and practices of political parties—especially of the FMLN—coincides with my observations of two meetings of an FMLN Base Committee in La Chacra. These base committee meetings consisted of a party representative speaking on behalf of a broker (who was not present), to encourage the FMLN militants in attendance to continue organizing in the community, while also working to cultivate contacts in certain government

entities controlled by the FMLN as ways to “bring projects to your communities.” The party representative was not directly offering party benefits but rather laying out the conditions necessary for party loyalists to access such benefits (access to employment training and unemployment insurance for example). Party militants would have to show that they deserved the benefits because they had done so much “community organizing” (which was understood to imply winning electoral converts to the party) as well as cultivating contacts in appropriate government institutions. A further implication was that the FMLN base committee in La Chacra was in competition with other territories for limited amounts of party benefits, but that now was the time to work to access these benefits: the FMLN was in power, and everyone’s collective work could ensure that they maintained power. These essentially instrumental discussions were embedded within a traditional “logic from below” discourse of the Salvadoran left, whereby community organizing and social solidarity, as coordinated through the FMLN, would lead to a “more just society” for the lower classes. The deployment of these “revolutionary” narratives to undergird calls for electoral organizing and institutional networking resonate with Javier Auyero’s work on poor people’s politics in urban Buenos Aires.²⁹

Throughout these accounts, (and in much additional data that I have not been able to include due to space constraints) complexity and contradiction exudes from people’s understandings of community relations with states institutions and parties—especially with the FMLN. On one hand, participants in an effort for violence prevention are actively searching out ways to access state and NGO money in order to “critically collaborate” with state institutions so as to instantiate public policies that are based on a perspective or standpoint “from below”.

²⁹ In his seminal work, Auyero complicates traditional notions of political clientelism to show how complex relationships between parties, brokers, and clients are based on shared historical memories and cultural representations while also constituting elements of survival networks for poor people.

Interviewees see this form of collaboration as possible with the FMLN in power, despite the fact that party representatives downplay standpoints from below in favor of encouraging party militants to cultivate institutional relations “above” themselves, and to simply continue organizing electorally. For my interviewees however, the determinant factors are not government institutions or electoral politics, but rather the grassroots “bases.” Deysi states, “We in the bases need to ensure that the policies that have been promised are actually implemented. To make sure that they are not giving us lies...I think we have come to a moment in which if you don’t exert pressure, things don’t get done. We want to see that the public institutions provide services as they should, and if they don’t comply, we have to make them comply.”

The Instrumentalization of Public Mobilization and the NGOization of Social Struggle

The five months of work that the Violence Prevention Team had invested in elaborating their proposal was to culminate in a public presentation of the plan itself, complete with a “White March for Peace” through the streets of La Chacra.³⁰ The march would then be followed by a “concentration” activity at the parish, which would be punctuated by music, and speeches about peace and violence prevention. In my interview with Jorge Ramirez, he stressed that in regard to the Violence Prevention Plan, “There has to be massive participation not only in the march itself, but also in the organization and execution of the other elements of the plan so that it doesn’t become something just ‘of the cupula’.” Jorge’s use of the word “cupula” is a reference to the inner circle of the FMLN, and in this case, its contextual deployment not only reflects the prevalence of a vanguardist organizational structure in El Salvador, but also Jorge’s worry that

³⁰ This “White March” is a deployment of the similar tactic that was used in the “Marchas Blancas” of the early 2000’s in which hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans took to the streets of San Salvador to oppose the privatization of health care. This protest campaign is widely considered to have been the most successful mass mobilization in El Salvador’s post-war history. (Almeida 2008; 2013.)

the Violence Prevention plan would not turn out to be as participatory and representative of the communities as initially hoped, but rather something simply deriving from the “cupula” of the Violence Prevention Team.

The March for Peace and the subsequent concentration were well attended. I (and others) estimated that there were well over three hundred people at each event. However, I later found out that the high level of attendance was due to the fact that both Maria Madre and Fe y Alegria had made participation *obligatory* for the beneficiaries of some of their social programs. There was no way of knowing how many people would have attended the activities if their social service support from the parish and school had not hung in the balance. And for all of the “rank and file” attendees, no one from the central government, or from the FMLN party, or from any prominent NGO or foundation attended the plan’s inauguration. Nevertheless, some participants—here represented by Jose Hernan, found the plan and the march to be a “utopic” project: something that permitted the inhabitants of La Chacra to keep walking forward, both literally and figuratively, towards a “more just society.”

The Violence Prevention Team thus falls into an interesting category in terms of social movement typology: what I would call the *emergence of a social movement/coalition*. Interestingly, this emergence did not respond to a political opportunity so much as to an economic opportunity based on the potential capitalization on the trending discourse of violence prevention and the social threats of violence itself. And while this process could thus be understood as an example of the NGOization of social struggle, the Violence Prevention Team is by no means a “big NGO” with offices, letterheads, and government contacts.³¹ These are

³¹ Anabel Recinos, in the movement territory of eastern Chalatenango was emphatic in asserting that many NGO’s are now just marketing themselves as doing violence prevention because it can get them money. She contends that it is the latest fundraising and organizing strategy for NGO’s/SMO’s.

representatives from churches, schools, and community boards who have a long-term stake in their own community. And despite their local and practical knowledge, without the “institutionalization” or “professionalization” of their movement, the Violence Prevention Team was in a difficult position from which to access attention from funders who could facilitate the activation of their project. A disconnect between the funding for important work and the people who could actually implement the important work is thus demonstrated in La Chacra, despite the discursive convergence between state policy priorities and localized proposals around violence prevention in the red zones of El Salvador.

Competing Logics in a Politics of Survival: The Neoliberal State, Gang Networks, and Community Organizing

The convergence of devastating neoliberal economic policies and the influence of gangs as agents of a new, non-state social order coalesced in the 90’s and 2000’s to create a novel situation in red zones like La Chacra. On one hand, gang networks constituted a violent economic survival network that responded to poverty, unemployment, and stigmatization.³² But gangs’ create situations of insecurity and “social disorder” that are often seen as damaging to their own communities motivating some inhabitants to abandon El Salvador altogether³³, and justifying repression by state forces of community inhabitants. Furthermore, gangs in La Chacra perceived violence prevention efforts by a dwindling group of community organizers and social

³² In this sense, I would advocate that academics begin interrogating gang networks as a type of community-based state form, or as a non-state social order where control of territories and populations, the implementation of rules and codes, and loyalty-based identities shape individual and collective subjectivities. Tarrow’s contentious politics, Bayat’s non-movements, and Zibechi’s territories in resistance are all conceptual frameworks that would be useful in this endeavor.

³³ A growing number of emigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are now fleeing gang and drug violence as much as material deprivation. Family reunification is also a growing motivation for emigration.

service providers as antithetical to their interest in maintaining violence-dependent extortion practices.

In addition to this dispute between two logics from below—that of community organizing and gang networks—my findings also reveal a disconnect between logics from below and the state institutions that promote a neoliberal state logic based on an instrumental, market-based approach to problem solving. The results of the prevalence of a neoliberal state logic can be seen in La Chacra through social service programs that respond to destructive neoliberal macroeconomic policies, as well as in the militarization of red zones, and the commodification of violence prevention. So while “social movements” are almost imperceptible in the movement territory of La Chacra, evidence of the dialogic relations between neoliberal state logic and logics from below, as well as of the prevalence of NGOization and violence, set the stage for exploring the rest of the movement territories in this study.

3.0 THE DREAM OF POPULAR POWER: CONTINUITY AND CONTRADICTION IN THE CCR OF EASTERN CHALATENANGO

Rugged, mountainous, and inhabited by poor peasants, it is the quintessential “liberated territory” that Salvadorans on the left speak of with pride in remembering the revolutionary triumphs of the FMLN during the 80’s. The vast majority of Chalatenango, a northern department of El Salvador, had been a stronghold of the Fuerzas de Liberacion Popular (FPL), arguably the strongest of the five factions of the FMLN. The FPL’s political-military apparatus had implemented a Maoist inspired “people’s war” in Chalatenango, creating alternative institutions in their territory, while defending it from the aggressions of the US-backed Salvadoran state. The FPL’s alternative institutions of health, education, and local governance drew heavily upon, and contributed to, already existing grassroots networks that had proliferated in the territory of Chalatenango in the 1960’s and 70’s³⁴. These community organizations facilitated a different history of civilian responses to war from those detailed above (internal migration, and emigration to other countries). In the first half of the 80’s, residents of Chalatenango traversed the mountains essentially *at the sides* of the FPL guerrillas. This led to massacres, “night flights” (guindas), and the eventual decision by the FPL that residents of Chalatenango go to refugee camps in Honduras. Close communication and coordination between the camps and FPL gave rise to the Asociacion para Desarrollo de las

³⁴ This historical information is substantiated by my interviewee's responses as well as the book published by CCR and “Norwegian Popular Help” called: *CCR: Organizacion y Lucha Popular en Chalatenango*; 2012.

Comunidades de Chalatenango (CCR), though it was originally known as the Committee for the Repopulation of Chalatenango. The CCR continues to be a regional chapter of CRIPDES, a national organization associated with the FPL that emerged to facilitate the “repopulations” of refugees at the national level, and is still the national coordinating body of four additional regional peasant groups like the CCR. Contrary to the public transcripts³⁵ of those who actually “came back” to the east Chalatenango near the end of the war (the first repopulation was in 1987) and state that they simply “had the desire” to “return to their places of origin” the decision for these populations to return was a strategic calculation by the leadership of the FMLN. By this point in the war, the FMLN was led by an alliance between the FPL and the Communist Party (CP), and in preparation for negotiations for peace, they were striving to situate “their” people in specific territories of El Salvador so as to strengthen their bargaining position (Sprenkels 2015; Viterna 2013).

This history of organization, popular struggle, and “return” to defend native lands looms large in the consciousness of the residents of Chalatenango, as it does in contemporary work of the CCR. An illustrative example of contemporary struggles occurred in the mid to late 2000’s in which the population and social organizations of eastern Chalatenango militantly resisted the incursion of mining companies into their territory. Led by the CCR, hundreds of residents blockaded access roads to the lands coveted by mining companies, and sabotaged or destroyed machinery that mining companies had left close to communities. These actions as well as the testimonies of a number of my interviewees reflected the territory inhabitants’ collective sentiment that after so many comrades and family members had sacrificed their lives to defend

³⁵ This term comes from James Scott (1990) to describe the deployment of discourses by the dominated that provide convincing evidence of the hegemony of dominant values. Here, and elsewhere in the paper, I use “public transcript” to refer to the slightly different situation whereby the dominated (participants in Salvadoran movement territories) use a certain transcript to conceal their private movement strategies and contradictions.

the land, “it would be impossible” for a foreign mining company to displace the people, contaminate the land and water, and “take the profits with them.”³⁶

Especially through the years of ARENA governments, the CCR, as part of CRIPDES, a member of the Movimiento de Resistencia Popular 12 de octubre (MPR-12), was involved in additional militant efforts (beyond mining) to resist neoliberal globalization (Almeida 2013). However, neoliberal state policies and rationalities that have led the to the NGO model’s penetration of struggles in the region, and increases in violence and emigration, have detrimentally impacted the work of the CCR. But in this movement territory, the FMLN’s rise to state power has perhaps been the more important contextual change in shaping movement perspectives and practices.

Given my past work experience in the region, I already had numerous good contacts, some of whom were no longer directly active in the CCR, and thus provided an important “outsider” view on the movement territory. In fact, my (seven) interviews with territory participants in Chalatenango can be easily divided into “CCR loyalists” (five) and “CCR critics” (two). While the loyalists provide the “party line” or public transcript of the CCR as a movement and its close articulation with the FMLN, the critics incisively deconstruct this transcript. But perhaps most interestingly, almost all of the voices coincide in acknowledging that the CCR follows “calls” from the FMLN in regard to when to mobilize (resulting in a “pacification” in the current context) and has “contributed leaderships” to the FMLN government upon its arrival to power, signifying decapitation in my conceptual framework. My participants primarily diverge only in evaluating the normative value of these social movement practices.

³⁶ I have much more data on the national (and transnational) anti-mining struggle in El Salvador that has been omitted for space concerns. See <http://www.stopesmining.org/j25/> for more information.

In the sense that the close ties between the CCR, CRIPDES, and the FMLN are historically grounded and also salient in contemporary strategic and financial terms, these ties exemplify what Paul Almeida calls “social movement partyism”. This concept refers to the blurry boundaries between some social movements and leftist parties in Central America as they struggle to resist neoliberalism. The term aptly identifies the *existence* of close relationships between the CCR, its allied organizations, its “militants”, and the FMLN. However, the voices of critics—as well as my own analysis—problematize the *content* or *substance* of the relationships between the FMLN and the CCR, enabling us to see how these “closely aligned” movements are in reality, either subordinated to the party, or conceptually inseparable from it.

“The President is a Man of the Team”: The Voices of CCR Loyalists

Angel Serrano is a historic leader of the community of Guarjila, one of the first repopulated communities in Chalatenango. He tells the story of this return and the reconstruction of Guarjila with emotion, depth, and detail. He emphasizes that “it was the organization of the people that was most important—it generated a power.” Angel explains how this popular power was so strong that when peace came and municipal governments were formed, there was tension between the community directives, and the new municipal councils—though controlled by the FMLN—over who really had ultimate decision-making power. In the end, it was the communities and the CCR, together with the help of international solidarity organizations, that were responsible for the “reconstruction” of the communities of eastern Chalate, which included installment of roads, bridges, electricity, and the incorporation of the organizations’ health and education infrastructure into the national systems.

Angel had invited his close comrade and neighbor, Anibal Guardado to join him during

the interview. Though in his mid 30's (much younger than Angel) Anibal also had considerable experience in different positions within the CCR, and in the community structures of Guarjila. With the FMLN's ascension to power in 2009, Anibal began serving in the Ministry of Governance in Chalatenango, and in this sense, constitutes an example of the "decapitation" of social movements. To be sure, Anibal had a much more political analysis than Angel in emphasizing the contrast between the marginalization and militant social movement activity of the communities of Chalatenango under ARENA governments³⁷, and the dramatic improvements in social programs under the FMLN administrations. Anibal also privileged a discussion of electoral consolidation and of improving the security situation as a way to let business flourish and produce development in El Salvador. He also provided a detailed and positive appraisal of the FMLN's negotiations with the Salvadoran private business sector and with the US. His views on these issues are indistinguishable from that of any party in power over a Central American neoliberal state.

Both Angel and Anibal felt that Sanchez Ceren was tasked with "deepening" and expanding the social programs begun by Funes. For Anibal this means that "public employees get out into the field to see what the needs of people are...this government wants to have encounters with the social organizations, support those social initiatives that come from the people—that aspect of trust between the government (and the people) is there now." Almost as if responding from the side of the historic peasant movements of Chalatenango, Angel said, "We in the social organizations are ready to be informed... to be at the service of there being a good governability, and transparency."

³⁷ These struggles included efforts for legal recognition of land stipulated by the Peace Accords, and the "white marches" to resist the privatization of health care in the early 2000's. See Almeida (2013) for more details on these struggles.

Angel went on to directly discuss the issue of mining within this frame, highlighting the people's knowledge, solidarity, and support of the government in rejecting mining so that "our dreams can continue, and the environment will not be destroyed." Angel asserts that "...to trust that the government can do anything and everything would be in a failure," and that the community directives and guilds and social organizations all continue in their work. However, he concludes with a firm endorsement of the Sanchez Ceren government, confident in the ability of the social organizations to dialogue directly with him. "We believe that the government we have is receptive, it will listen to us. The president is a man of the team." This exchange maps directly on to Almeida's conception of social movement partyism whereby the movement and party work together in a seamless and egalitarian way, with Angel representing movements and Anibal the party.

Sonia Aleman, the women's committee president in Guarjila's neighboring community of Ignacio Ellacuria, goes even further with these sentiments, expressing a position whereby the arrival of the FMLN governments, "For the social organizations with leftist affinity—even though we say that we are apolitical—it has been joyous, not a surprise but happiness, because now it is easier to work together, to come to agreements because the government knows the history of the people, it knows their needs."

Armando Marin, another historic leader in Guarjila and the CCR, reiterates Angel, Anibal, and Sonia's thoughts, but in fact upsets the carefully egalitarian balance between party and movements in social movement partyism, saying that "civil society needs to join efforts of the government, so that change can be made." He even refers directly to the decline in protests under the FMLN saying, "With a government of the left, in the communities, we *share* a vision with the government, and so lately, there have not been marches to demand something of the

government, because now the community and the NGO's have a direct link to the government.”

Armando sees this direct link being facilitated by many people from CRIPDES and other organizations now forming part of the government: “The social organizations have contributed many leaderships—as much at the municipal level as in the government institutions. So that makes it a government truly committed to the people, and ensures that functionaries come to the people.” Armando also posits the distinctly electoral-political angle of social movement activity in the new context, mentioning social organizations’ efforts to “maintain” the FMLN in power by ensuring the success of government programs and fomenting trust in the government among undecided voters. Thus it seems that social movement organizations work for the electoral interests of the party, not just on common issues of structural import.

The Uncertain Boundaries of Social Movement Partyism: the CCR as an Institution

Juventina Ramirez is the current president of the CCR. Elected to the position in 2012, she reflects a Salvadoran version of the Zapatista maxim of “lead by obeying” when describing her personal feelings about holding the position: “If you have the will, and the people support you, and they say that we want you to represent us , well then you have to work.” In her analysis of the CCR’s labors in the context of the FMLN’s rise to power, she reiterates much of Angel and Anibal’s discourse in highlighting the advances for the poor under the FMLN governments. She also details the CCR’s political advocacy work against the “projects of death” of the neoliberal state, such as mining, free trade agreements, and the privatization of water.

Interestingly, much of the CCR’s current advocacy work has become focused on agitating for the approval of new laws that would protect the rights to water, food sovereignty,

and affordable medicine.³⁸ At the level of the communities, the CCR continues working to “keep historic memory alive”, strengthen the community directives (which are the “greatest authority in the communities”) and to strengthen women’s committees “so that they know the laws that exist in favor of women”.³⁹ In terms of the CCR’s relations with local municipal governments, Juventina states almost boastfully with reference to localized social movement partyism, “We always have our best alliances with the mayors. The mayors are born in the CCR. Some of them have been part of this great organization, and that facilitates efforts to work with them.” Up until this point, Juventina’s account of the CCR’s work is consistent with the organization’s historical legacy and public transcript. However, in regard to the CCR’s mobilization processes under FMLN governments, the murky boundaries of the CCR’s public transcript emerge.

Juventina explained the CCR’s mobilizations as deriving from calls from CRIPDES, the national organization of which the CCR is a regional chapter, emphasizing that the CCR “unites” with many other organizations for its street actions. She quickly elaborated on the political implications of this process, “Also, it doesn't matter...that they (the government) are of the FMLN. If something is being violated... we have to go out to mobilize—it doesn't matter if it comes from the Frente (FMLN).” But when I asked her how the FMLN being in government impacts these social mobilizations, she began to fumble and seemed unwilling to delve into such analytic territory, stating revealingly, “We see that we have let many things pass by because it

³⁸ There have been particularly recent actions for legislative ratification of a constitutional amendment to enshrine water and food as human rights. “Water at the Heart of El Salvador’s Struggle Against Neoliberalism,” Foro del Agua El Salvador, Blue Planet Project, 2015. <http://www.blueplanetproject.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/ElSalvador-Report-0315.pdf> This type of advocacy also substantiates Smith and Wiest’s (2013) assertion that anti-systemic movements use the norms of international law as leverage to pursue anti-systemic claims.

³⁹ On this issue, Sonia Aleman adds substance to Juventina’s statement, and in fact echoes the strategies of critical collaboration that are implemented by the Concertacion de Mujeres in Suchitoto as we will see in the next section.

(the government) is of the left,” and with that, she brought that line of questioning to a close. The lesson seemed clear: there were elements of FMLN government policies that Juventina did not agree with. However, as an institutional leader of the CCR, she did not feel comfortable detailing a potentially condemnatory critique of the organization’s allied party.

“The Social Movements are Dispersed”: Critical Voices from Beyond the CCR

It was a very distinct interactional experience with Isabel Membreno, another historic community leader in the territory of eastern Chalatenango, and someone I had considered a friend and confidant since around 2007. Isabel resides in the community of Ignacio Ellacuria, and was the President of the CCR from 2006-2008, when I worked closely with the CCR on behalf of SHARE. Isabel was a mid-range officer in the FPL, spending his youth and early adulthood strategizing and fighting alongside comrades who are now legislative deputies, ministers, and ambassadors in the FMLN government. Isabel sits on the Board of Directors of CRIPDES, and tends his cornfields and cattle. The divergent destinies of he and some of his comrades is a sticking point in his understanding of social movements and politics in El Salvador, as well as an important analytic signal for understanding the divergences between community logic and neoliberal state logic.

Isabel remembers the dream of the FPL in the 80’s as one of “forming a new popular government with a more social focus at a national level. That was the dream of power.” But he quickly juxtaposes this vision with what has become of the FMLN in the aftermath of peace, whereby the FMLN’s leaders left the communities, entering “into a different political scenario” where the “real feeling” (of the struggle) began to deteriorate. Much to the chagrin of the party leaders according to Isabel, he and other critics distinguish between the “Historic FMLN”, and

the “Current FMLN” whereby the party leaders have “become comfortable” and ascended to a “new social class” which is far away from the realities of the people. According to Isabel, “this makes people change,”⁴⁰ and this leads him to analyze that: “Social movements are dispersed. There seems to be a type of anesthesia that...is beneficial for the FMLN—to not have a strong movement.”

While Isabel did not end up articulating exactly why this “anesthesia” of movements would benefit the FMLN, he implies later in the interview that it is because the leadership of the FMLN is not interested in participatory democracy within its own ranks, and that these “ranks” include social movement organizations such as the CCR and CRIPDES. He provides examples related to FMLN party practices, saying that instead of making a representative out of the person most loyal to the people and the communities, “They (the party) look for the person who is most loyal to a sector of the party, he is who is most obedient...in the sense of searching out a personal objective (through the party).” Isabel proceeded to provide numerous examples of the FMLN “handpicking” candidates for legislative elections in municipal and legislative elections in Chalatenango despite resistance from broad sections of the communities.⁴¹

In the end, Isabel accuses CRIPDES (and by extension the CCR) of not having a strategic vision, and of transforming into an “operational organization” that functions based on “projects” that come from foreign funders—another example of the NGOization of social struggle in El Salvador. Isabel also states that the FMLN tells CRIPDES when and what to protest, which

⁴⁰ This resonates with Bamyeh’s (2009) discussion of how state power changes the psychology of leaders toward privileging their own self-preservation over the transformation of society. In the case of FMLN leaders, this process seems to have started even before they attained state power.

⁴¹ An emblematic and embarrassing example (for the FMLN) of this phenomenon occurred in the most recent municipal elections of 2015 where in San Antonio Los Ranchos, the municipality next to Guarjila, inhabitants—who claimed to be “100% FMLN”—refused to vote for the party’s imposed candidate. See <http://www.elfaro.net/es/201502/noticias/16513/Al-FMLN-se-le-amotina-la-militancia-en-el-pueblo-de-Los-Ranchos.htm>

dovetails with “loyalist” accounts. In practical terms, CRIPDES ends up being “glued to” the mandates of the party and its funding, as opposed to “the realities of the people”. This analysis exemplifies the “hidden” content of the relationships between movements and the party within social movement partyism, once the left comes to power.

Isabel’s views could perhaps be taken as mere bitterness and disillusionment if they were not echoed by others⁴², such as Anabel Recinos, the most forceful CCR critic amongst my interviewees in this territory. Brought up in the organizational structures of Ignacio Ellacuria and the CCR, but also trained in citizen participation and human rights in Europe and South America, she was a leading participant in national youth advocacy efforts to enshrine a national youth law during the Funes administration. Anabel is an experienced, though young activist, and seasoned (if cynical) socio-political thinker who currently leads Ignacio Ellacuria’s Historical Memory committee, and is obtaining her law degree. Throughout her interview, she constantly delineates elements of a “real political participation”—where all relevant groups are consulted, participation by groups is “binding” and not contingent on a certain organizational structure or legal standing, and groups are not “coopted” (in her words) by *asistencialismo* or hand outs, but rather involved in policy-making and implementation that has a “rights-based focus”.

Anabel’s clear, raw critique of social movement partyism dovetails with Isabel’s in positing that the FMLN “uses the social movement to carry its flag” and tells movements what to promote and struggle for. In contrast, she thinks that the party should comply with what the movement demands, and that a true social movement “comes from below” and “should never permit anyone to tell them what agenda to have.” She also heavily critiques the NGOization of social movements and community organizations, saying that alleged movements (she doubts that

⁴² These others also include Sprenkels (2015) and Alfredo Carias, the communications representative for the National Roundtable against Mining in El Salvador, one of my “expert” interviewees.

any truly exist in El Salvador) and community groups “don’t have clear objectives”, and change their organizational structures just to get funds. On the issue of social movement decapitation, Anabel states that, “Funes took the best—the heads of the social movements” and that movement leaders gladly took these positions as “repayment” for their years of struggle. However, Anabel sees this as a ploy to keep groups such as the MPR-12, CRIPDES and the CCR from “being in the streets.” Finally, speaking of her own experiences in Ignacio Ellacuria and among social organizations of the left in El Salvador, Anabel states: “One cannot be critical anymore, if you say that the party is wrong, or is screwing up...they call you right wing—of ARENA.”

Was it Worth it? Community Logic and the Meaning of “Struggle” in Changing Contexts

At the end of his interview, Isabel waxes eloquently about the values of solidarity and camaraderie that “everyone learned” during the war, and which he would like to “rescue from the struggle”. These days he sees the struggle as one that is “more than anything, for the dignity of the people, so that they people are respected, so that they are listened to.” He contrasts this with FMLN party leaders who only work for and talk about the interests of the party, and with the fact that “nothing has changed” in terms of the political and economic model. He admits that these results make him wonder, “if the struggle was worth it.” Others such as Sonia Aleman, cites the arrival of Sanchez Ceren to the presidency as having made the “struggle worth it”.

Despite their differing evaluations of the worth of the struggle, Isabel and Sonia’s comments evince the salience of the lens of “historical memory.” CCR movement territory participants (more so than those in La Chacra) deploy the memory of past struggle in the Civil War of the 80’s to navigate understandings of the present, especially the intersections between the legacy of the community logic of “popular power” that was so prevalent during the 70’s and

80's in the movement territory of eastern Chalatenango, and the influence of new phenomena that derive from the policies and rationalities of the neoliberal state such as social (gang) violence, emigration⁴³, asistencialismo, and NGOization. In this sense, Isabel and Sonia also converge in their analysis of one of the FMLN governments' heralded programs of "change"—the agricultural packets now given out to farmers—as something that is asistencialismo⁴⁴ and does not address structural issues of food sovereignty for which rural communities are struggling. The implication of their views is that the FMLN's current social programs are not resisting neoliberal state logic in ways that could lead to the construction of a viable alternative for rural producers. Nevertheless, their historical memory enables them to dream larger than the handouts that the FMLN has provided to them, and to believe in the power of the historic community logic based on community organizing and social solidarity.

Thus, the movement territory of eastern Chalateango shows the most drastic divergences of perspectives of all my movement territories, though also very interesting convergences. Loyalists and critics of the local social movement organization, CCR, ascribe to very different interpretations of the participatory credentials of the FMLN, its state institutions, and the CCR, as well as whether or not it is good or bad that the CCR mobilizes and staffs government positions at the FMLN's bidding. So while we hear some echoes of the demands of La Chacra's inhabitants that state institutions "come down", we can at least partially attribute these specific demands to the fact that the movement territory of La Chacra has never had a institutionalized link with the FMLN, and feel intensely separated from party leadership. The perspectives of

⁴³ The issues of gang violence and emigration as obstacles to community and social movement organizing came up frequently in my interviews with participants in the movement territory of Chalatenango as well as with Alfredo Carias, who made frequent reference to Chalatenango.

⁴⁴ Isabel says "the little agricultural packet that they give us as farmers—a little bag of "improved" (transgenic) corn and a bag of fertilizer—that is a joke at the end of the day."

CCR movement territory participants on the other hand exhibit an understanding, and a subsequent problematization or glorification of the institutionalized, historic link between these communities and the FMLN, represented by the CCR.

4.0 “AUTONOMY IS THAT I DECIDE”: LA CONCERTACION DE MUJERES EN SUCHITOTO

Lying about thirty miles north and slightly east of San Salvador, the semi-urban town of Suchitoto and its surrounding communities are upstream on the Rio Acelhuate (which flows through La Chacra). Suchitoto in fact sits at the river’s manmade end—high atop the banks of the Lago Suchitlan, a reservoir that putridly pools behind the 15 de septiembre hydroelectric dam east of Suchitoto. Much of the colonial infrastructure in its “urban center” endured the destruction of the Civil War of the 80’s, though the communities on Suchitoto’s outskirts were ravaged. One can still find bombed-out houses standing precariously on the country roads that branch out from the town. Similar to eastern Chalatenango, this rural area was a guerrilla stronghold with the mountainous areas of Guazapa to its south, and Cinquera to its east. However, Guazapa was an area of convergence among FMLN factions, with all five factions laying claim to sections of its peaks, which at only 30 miles from San Salvador, was the closest guerrilla staging ground to the capital.

Though I had been to the Suchitoto area many times before, the series of research visits associated with the present paper afforded me less depth of understanding of Suchitoto as a movement territory, compared to the other territories I studied. I had set out to research the Concertacion de Mujeres (from here on, the Concerta, as the women call it), a well known, and extremely active women’s organization in the territory of Suchitoto. I got “in” with the women

of the organization through Arely Gomez, an interviewee in La Chacra, who had been involved in an alternative economic market that the Concerta had promoted in San Salvador.

I interviewed five women who all worked with the Concerta in some capacity and thus, their explanations of the organization's concrete practices and political vision was largely similar. Though this afforded me a less critical view of this movement territory, it is clear that the work of the Concerta has come to greatly influence the territory, especially as their struggle to defend the rights of women has become woven into the institutional practices of local public entities as well as the cultural fabric of the communities themselves. Additionally, the information I received from these five women constitutes the conceptual and empirical foundation of the concept of critical collaboration that I use throughout the rest of the paper. The Concerta's nuanced and "propio" ("own" or unique) practices of relations with state institutions provides an innovative example of how community logic can in fact penetrate and appropriate these institutions, instead of the other way around⁴⁵, and how these political practices are complemented by community-based organizational work to shape patterns of culture and socialization.

Life and Organizational Histories: Incorporation and Holistic Work

With the support of two religious women from the US⁴⁶, the Concerta began working in the early 90's with a focus on community organizing and prevention of violence against women. According to Morena Herrera, one of the leading feminist intellectuals in El Salvador and a

⁴⁵ Appropriating state institutions is of course a classic revolutionary strategy, but here it seems to be colonization through an alternative *logic* as opposed to a competing *ideology* that utilizes the same (in this case) neoliberal-state logic.

⁴⁶ Three of the five women mentioned Sisters Peggy O' Neill and Patty as influential in the initial founding of the Concerta.

founder of the Concerta, the emergence of the Concerta and other women's organizations across the country signaled a moment in which the struggles of women and "other social movements and organizations" were no longer "subordinated to the military-political struggle of the FMLN." She describes this historical moment as one in which women's organizations "had their own agendas and didn't ask permission of anyone." The implication is that this desire for their own agendas precipitated the break of some prominent women leaders from the FMLN.⁴⁷ By the first democratic elections of 1994 the Concerta was involved in advocacy work to ensure that women were represented on the municipal council in Suchitoto so as to subsequently work for a municipal policy of gender equality.

The FMLN contingent of Suchitoto is divided between those with loyalty to the FPL and the Resistencia Nacional (RN), according to Eva Martinez, the top administrator of the Concerta, though the conventional wisdom (outside Suchitoto) is that the territory is of the RN. Despite this division, the FMLN has controlled the municipal government for many years, and Eva states that the Concerta works so that this factional division is not an obstacle to their work with women. She describes the relationship with FMLN at the local level in the following way: "we have always gone about working with the municipality...and sometimes fighting with the Frente (laughing) and of course the Concerta has its leftist tendency, but we are also open to all of the problems of women without taking into account their religion or their party. What we are interested in is the rights of women, and in the parties, the patriarchal system exists! And so that is where there have been some contradictions..." More broadly, she describes the Concerta doing "territorial work at the level of the municipality where we focus on empowering women, so that

⁴⁷ I don't know if this was something that was more frequent in the RN but it is undeniable that militant women have congregated in organizations in Suchitoto and that the territory is considered to house the most powerful, territorialized women's movement in the country, according to these women and others.

women discover the leader that they have within them, and with the vision for a future in which society is more just.”

Four of the five women I interviewed were participants of some sort in the war, though this was not always expressed explicitly. Ana Maria said, “I was with the mass organizations,” and Morena told a long story of her involvement with the RN, including remarks such as “I helped the urban militias and neighborhood committees.” For Morena, it was when she went to San Salvador for the final guerilla offensive of 1989 that she met the women with whom she would later form Las Dignas, the organization that in many ways, set the course for women’s organizing in the entire country, and also influenced the founding of the Concerta. Two other women, the sisters, Ana Maria and Eva Martinez, cited familial links in the guerrillas and subsequent popular organizations as their path to involvement. Vilma Coreas Guzman on the other hand, became involved due to violence against loved ones, whereby she incorporated into the guerrillas out of “indignation, and a desire to get to know things, and why (they were happening)”. Vilma maintains a critical view toward the left and political parties more generally, but she also cites the war as a catalyst in the development of her consciousness⁴⁸, as do the other women I talked with (except Marlene, the recent recruit).

In the late 90’s and early 2000’s, at the request of the women themselves, according to Ana Maria, the director of one of the Concerta’s economic programs, the Concerta started promoting economic initiatives so that women could cease to depend on men and attain “economic autonomy”, thereby also preventing violence against them. Ana Maria describes this process by positing that “Autonomy is that I decide. If I want to sell my cow, I sell it, and I

⁴⁸ This divergence in life trajectories corresponds directly to Viterna’s analysis of micro-processes of women’s mobilization into the FMLN, but from this angle we see how activists in the same organization can ascribe to/participate in similar practices of critical collaboration and mutual aid despite significant differences in their political history.

don't have to ask permission for that. I have the power to make decisions. When I make my decisions I have autonomy.” However, Ana Maria recognizes that it is a long process for women to come to a place of autonomy. Vilma, who runs the communal bank program, adds that receipt of the credits have the requirement that the women “form” themselves, which entails awareness-raising efforts in their organizing with women, as well as their comprehensive “repertoire of strategies”⁴⁹ in the struggle for women’s rights.

Community Logics of (Trans) Formation as Alternative Cultural Processes

These formation processes that accompany the Concerta’s provision of direct services and economic empowerment enable “women to understand their rights so that they can defend them, and make their rights *exercised*,” according to Eva. The women all asserted that the combination of formal education with the type of education or formation processes that the Concerta does, has a positive and transformative effect on culture and socialization processes. They point out that this “human formation” is missing from much of what is done in the municipal councils, and more formal political decision-making processes. Thus the awareness-raising and new processes of socialization for women—and for the larger society—constitute linkages between the personal and the collective, the public and the private, the political and the cultural. This is due not least of all, to the fact that these formation processes contribute to a pleasure in agency (Wood 2003). Marlene de Carmen Ortiz, the director of the Concerta’s violence prevention program, states that, “Having incorporated into these processes has helped me a lot at the personal level. I have acquired a lot of knowledge as well as technical abilities...

⁴⁹ In his forthcoming “Conceptualizing Strategy Making in a Historical and Collective Perspective” in the edited volume *Social Movement Dynamics: New Perspectives on Theory and Research from Latin America*, Federico Rossi uses the term repertoire of strategies to expand Tilly’s repertoire of contention to include movement activities conducted outside of the public sphere, such as private negotiation with authorities or internal movement building

(Being involved in this work) makes me feel very good because when one learns, one feels that their self-esteem gets better...it gives you a level of knowledge that helps you, because you defend your rights.”

But it is not only directly with women beneficiaries that the Concerta’s impact on Suchitoto is palpable. While many national and international visitors are attracted to the town by its colonial infrastructure, stylish restaurants, and proximity to the beautiful (from afar) Lake Suchitlan, the Concerta’s aesthetic mark on the town is ubiquitous. Many of the houses in the urban center, as well as in the surrounding communities, bear the Concerta’s prominent, stenciled stamp of a Torogoz (the Salvadoran national bird) with the words: “In this house, we want a life free of violence toward women.” The Concerta is also the primary sponsors of local “alternative markets” on weekends, and the operators of the city’s “House of the Woman” where women can come to denounce violence or abuse. This House of the Woman also sells many products of the Concerta’s economic initiatives for women, such as their signature indigo-inflected clothing line, which can be found in stores and on bodies throughout the country.

“We Didn’t want the Law to Remain on Paper:” Political and Advocacy Work

Beyond the constant struggle to have women on the Municipal council and in “spaces where political decisions are made”, the Concerta is involved in additional practices of political advocacy. They participate in public actions of lobbying for women’s rights around issues of abortion criminalization⁵⁰, the medicalization of births, and violence against women. For the Concerta, processes of advocacy work include: the definition of targets of actions (among the

⁵⁰ See <http://www.reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicactions.net/files/documents/El-Salvador-CriminalizationOfAbortion-Report.pdf> for a full account of the causes and disastrous effects of the criminalization of abortion in El Salvador.

menu of state institutions), the mobilization of women—(“If we want 2,000 women then 2,000 of us go to San Salvador—with or without funds because a cause or a woman needs to be supported,” according to Vilma)—and follow up with the relevant state institutions. This type of process achieved the approval of a gender equity policy in Suchitoto in 2000, as well as the national level “Special and Holistic Law Against Violence Toward Women” in 2010, among other successes. Advocacy work is done in coalition with other women’s and feminist groups at the local and national level, as according to Eva, “we know that one group by itself, will not achieve it (a demand), so we make demands together.”

The women also frequently cited the successful advocacy and coordination with the Ministry of Health that led to the inauguration of a Center for Holistic Health of Women in Suchitoto. They have also coordinated with the Ministries of Health and Education to train doctors, nurses, administrators, and teachers in issues of sexual and reproductive rights, though this work has met with much resistance given the influence of religion on Salvadoran society which parallels the stigmatization of the work of women more generally. However, the women think they are making progress in raising awareness of sexual and reproductive rights that are “also human rights, like all other human rights”.

But perhaps most interesting in its transcendence of typical conceptions of political advocacy, the Concerta has been extremely influential at the municipal level in Suchitoto in shaping new ways for state institutions to attend to women, especially in the wake of the approval of the “Special and Holistic Law Against Violence Toward Women” of 2010. Members of the Concerta were not only involved in the writing of this law, but also in the grassroots agitation for its approval. Marlene described how they are ensuring this law’s application: “We define the responsibilities of the public institutions—which includes an agreement with the PNC

regarding a protocol of procedure of attention to women who have been victims of violence.” The Concerta itself is responsible for “a process of training, and awareness raising with all of the personnel from the police, district attorney, the courts, the hospitals, health clinic, and from the four schools...” so that women victims of violence are attended through interactional dynamics that do not “re-victimize” them. Marlene heads a technical commission that ensures institutional compliance with the protocol of attention. She states that, “If we had not created this technical commission, it (the protocol of attention based on the Holistic Law against violence) would have become just a document that gets saved in a desk.

“Supporting the Good, Critiquing the Bad”: Critical Collaboration with the FMLN

The essence of the Concerta’s vision and practice of relations with state institutions, at the local and national level, is best summarized by Morena, who deploys the concept of “critical collaboration”, to refer to participation in spaces of negotiation and policy-making with state institutions, as well as in supporting, (and even training state officials to comply with certain policies and laws) while the movement maintains its autonomy. This type of participation or collaboration, is especially salient on those issues, such as in sexual and reproductive rights, where the Concerta is the source of expert knowledge, the “overseer”, or the entity which imparts trainings, such as in state institutions’ attention to women victims of violence.⁵¹ Thus, this type of social movement relation with state institutions shows a localized and gendered mobilization that results in a penetration of local political institutions by organizations specifically focused on defending the rights of women. This leads to constant processes of

⁵¹ Alvarez (1999) worries that the “subcontracting” of feminist organizations by neoliberalized states as experts on gender policies and programs can diminish groups’ status as advocates of rights, but this seemed to not be the least bit of a problem or worry for the Concerta. Rather, they consider their participation, implementation, and oversight of public policies as a resounding success in the context of their model of critical collaboration.

mutual work between the Concerta and state institutions, where, in the words of Morena and Vilma, they “support in what is good and criticize what is bad.”

Despite the generalized strategy of critical collaboration that characterizes the Concerta’s relations with state institutions, the women’s individual views on the FMLN party were quite varied. Eva thinks that there may be good will in the FMLN, but there is lack of resources, and drastic changes cannot happen overnight. She emphasizes that, “every member of society is responsible for making the changes that we want to achieve.” For her part, Ana Maria perceives that the FMLN does not see women as rights-bearing subjects so much as potential votes. Vilma was perhaps the most critical of the FMLN, saying that the party is, “repeating the same campaign of the right. They offer and they offer, but they never comply with anything.”

For the most part however, Vilma refused to talk directly about the FMLN, but rather directed her critiques and demands to all political parties and state institutions. She advocated that, “laws be applied according to the lived realities and rights of women. They (state officials) need to come to agreements with the women, and the associations in the communities. They have to come close and dialogue with the population so that what they apply is based on the felt demands and needs, not based on their thoughts from there...they are thinking from above, but they need to dialogue with the population...”

With the words of Vilma, we see that working directly with state institutions in processes of critical collaboration does not eviscerate the type of calls that emanate from La Chacra for state institutions to “come down” and dialogue with the population. Rather I would understand that calls for, and practices of dialogue between communities and state authorities constitute the first step toward a critical collaboration with state institutions. Additionally, I would content that the concept and practice of critical collaboration houses an implicit distrust of the state, as in the

case of the Concerta, they consider themselves the experts who need to impart knowledge, skills, and protocols to state functionaries—not the other way around. Further substantiating a critique of state capacity or trustworthiness, the Concerta’s women all coincided in stating, as mentioned above, that laws are only applied when people organize to guarantee their application.

Nevertheless, all of the women cited the “openness” of the new government as positive and facilitative of their advocacy work. They also see the state, especially institutions such as the Ministries of Health and Education, as having an important and positive role in promoting the cultural and social changes around sexual and reproductive rights that the Concerta is working for. Finally, the Funes administration inaugurated Ciudad Mujer, which has a headquarters in each of El Salvador’s 16 departments, and in the words of Morena, is “the first governmental project that really dedicates public resources in important quality and quantity to create services and education for women in the problems they confront,” something that is an “undeniable improvement.”

But for all of the successes of the Concerta in Suchitoto and in national-level policies and institutions, Morena also identifies important difficulties for the women’s movement in its interactions with the FMLN government. She described processes of decapitation whereby leaders in feminist and women’s organizations “accepted invitations” to work in government institutions such as Ciudad Mujer and the Instituto Salvadoreño Para el Desarrollo de la Mujer (ISDEMU) thereby weakening the movements they left behind. In more general terms, Morena highlights the “ambiguous” relation between the women’s movements and the FMLN government, as many state officials “dislike women’s movements’ critical stances”. But Morena contends that “making demands on a government in fact gives it more legitimacy” and that

demands must be followed up with concrete agreements and work with the appropriate state institutions—another formulation of critical collaboration.

The Concerta's Successes: Public Transcript or Model Movement?

As far as I can tell, and according to the women, the Concerta and its allied organizations in Suchitoto and across the country are the architects, and the only practitioners of critical collaboration. In this sense, the women see their Suchitoto movement territory as far “ahead” of the rest of the country in terms of women’s organizing, and also as a potential example for women’s organizations in other territories. However, the model of organizing militant citizen oversight of the practice of state institutions and officials (though not their training perse), is being taken up by the Foro de Salud and Foro de Agua,⁵² though we cannot know to what extent this may have resulted from the diffusion of women’s organizations repertoires of strategies.

Extrapolating into the realm of global diffusion, Morena’s influence on the Concerta’s practice of critical collaboration should be understood as a result of her own self-declared development in the 90’s through her participation in the influential international women’s conferences in Beijing, Vienna, and Cairo. Morena was the only one of the women I interviewed who declared herself a member of a “global movement—feminist, but also humanist,” but the Concerta’s model came directly from her and a few of her other feminist comrades, thereby implicating the Concerta itself as a member of a global women’s movement as well.⁵³

Much to my surprise however, upon analyzing my data from the Concerta, there was no real mention of neoliberal state policies, rationalities, or effects except to highlight the way that

⁵² A large portion of my interview with Deysi Valdez in La Chacra revolved around her participation in the Foro de Salud and their contentious work to oversee and improve the work of various aspects of health care in El Salvador.

⁵³ Smith and Weist (2013) describe how transnational feminist organizing around human rights for women in the 90’s has permeated national and local women’s organizing throughout the world.

gender inequality is embedded in forms of the state, capital, and the family. On one hand, this should be understood as deriving from the Concerta's specific focus on women's issues, though the lack of mention of NGOization⁵⁴ and gang violence⁵⁵ could have resulted from the women's deployment of public transcripts for my benefit, especially given the fact that they were all institutional representatives of the organization I was researching.

In general terms, it would seem the Concerta as an organization was only minimally impacted by the FMLN arriving to government, as they had already established themselves as the authority and agenda-setter on issues of women's rights in the movement territory of Suchitoto. This fact should be considered a resounding movement success.⁵⁶ In this sense, I would contend that the movement territory of Suchitoto reflects the way in which a specific social movement organization, the Concerta in this case, can foment localized, gendered, and cultural mobilization that can colonize institutions of governance as a way of resisting and remaking the neoliberal state, itself permeated and perpetuated by gender inequality. The Concerta also deploys a holistic repertoire of strategies, with critical collaboration with state institutions at its core. This seems like not only a novel social movement practice, but also an example that could be diffused to movements working on other agendas.

⁵⁴ I doubt any movement in El Salvador is free of this phenomenon, and much less women's movements, given the work of Alvarez and others.

⁵⁵ Suchitoto has seen increasing gang related violence, though primarily in its outlying communities and not in the urban center, which is heavily guarded by tourism police.

⁵⁶ If I were to have had a more comprehensive view of this territory, I could have evaluated the Concerta's relative success more "objectively". For instance, factors such as Suchitoto's strong local left politics and associations, its status as a tourist destination, and its relative wealth in its urban zone are variables that may have interacted with my findings but that fall outside the scope of my research.

5.0 “IN DEFENSE OF TERRITORY”: CESTA, TOURISM, AND COMMUNITY LOGIC IN THE BAJO LEMPA

On the southeastern Pacific coast of El Salvador, the San Juan del Gozo peninsula sets off the Bay of Jiquilisco from the eastern banks of the widening mouth of the River Lempa just before it enters the Pacific Ocean. One of El Salvador’s most beautiful and bio-diverse areas, this land had been historically used for cotton and sugarcane production, though these plantations were abandoned during the Civil War of the 1980’s. As part of the Peace Accords of 1992, the lands were divided up and given to ex-combatants who repopulated the areas, and constructed their own communities from scratch (similar to the process described in Chalatenango in Section 2). In the context of my research, I interviewed four movement participants in three different communities in the Bajo Lempa region: La Canoa, La Tirana, and El Chile, as well as spoke with representatives from the Salvadoran Center for Appropriate Technology (CESTA) an environmental organization with extensive work in the Bajo Lempa region. It was the work of CESTA that led me to want to interrogate this movement territory, though it ended up being my friends in the international solidarity organization, Voices on the Border, that provided my “in” with the movement participants that I ended up interviewing.

CESTA promotes a non-state centered model of community organization, agricultural production, and technological development that focuses on environmental sustainability. They emphasize local control of resources, as well as organic, sustainable farming with native seeds,

as ways to help rural communities achieve localized economic and political autonomy. CESTA has been critical of the FMLN's neoliberal state project, and especially its promotion of transnational tourism in the coastal regions of Usulután through the US-funded Millennium Challenge Account,⁵⁷ as a way of further inserting El Salvador into global circuits of accumulation. CESTA has historically been independent of the FMLN as a political party and is an important element of the growing transnational environmental movement in Central America. In the Bajo Lempa region, CESTA coordinates with a wealth of other social movement organizations of differing status (from community directive boards and federations of communities, to radical environmental NGO's of local and international varieties.)

The Community Octavio Ortiz, colloquially known as *la Canoa*, is a quintessential example of a Bajo Lempa repopulated community. *La Canoa* exhibits a high level of organization, unity (though there are always controversies—often times regarding community work, according to Juana Amaya, a participant in many of *La Canoa*'s community organizations) and historical commitment with the FMLN. The majority of the community's inhabitants are internal immigrants from the northeastern department of Morazan, where they spent the 80's as militants in the ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo) faction of the FMLN. People in *La Canoa* tend to see “what they have” (lands, housing, the potential to be self-sufficient) as a result of the FMLN's and their family members' struggles. According to Concepción Vigil (Conce), however, their loyalty to the FMLN quickly waned after the Peace Accords, as the ERP's primary leader, Joaquín Villalobos, broke relations with the FMLN in disagreement with the transformation of a military structure into a political party that would maintain the same internal

⁵⁷ <http://www.verdaddigital.com/index.php/nacionales/10045-turismo-transnacional-impactara-negativamente-en-la-zona-costera-del-pais>

structure.⁵⁸

In geographic terms, the community of La Canoa is often considered representative of the Bajo Lempa because of its precarious location on the banks of the River Lempa, which periodically floods, devastating crops and houses. In these moments, the community's communal house is often converted into a temporary shelter. While most of the flooding is due to the mismanagement of the semi-private hydroelectric dams upriver, it is also blamed on the faulty levees on the river's banks, which is considered an oversight of the central government. Members of La Canoa like Conce, founded the Association of Communities for the Social and Economic Development of the Bajo Lempa (ACUDESBAL) to deal with the flooding issues, though the association has now also undertaken projects in the areas of sustainable agriculture, women's empowerment, and additional infrastructural projects. ACUDESBAL's internal organization, like the organization of the community directives of La Canoa and the other communities that belong to ACUDESBAL, is based on rotating, elected leadership, and popular assemblies where proposals are collectively and publicly deliberated upon.

La Canoa's economic production is primarily based on agricultural goods such as corn, beans, rice, yucca, plaintains and various other fruits and vegetables that serve for local consumption. The community also has an agricultural cooperative that provides inputs for a number of local production activities, such as a women's groups that makes candy and jellies, a bakery, and a group that harvests and processes artisanal sugar, which is then used by the women in the candy production, as well as sold beyond the community. While these small-scale initiatives have tended to benefit only those select few community members who work in them, according to Juana, recent proposals have been made at community assemblies to put the

⁵⁸ Conce's analysis coincides with that of Sprenkels in noting the FMLN's structural consistency despite its transition from a military to an electoral entity.

administration and operation of these economic projects under the community cooperative so that the work and benefits are equally distributed to all community members.

At a more ecological and political level, Conce and Juana maintain that residents of La Canoa are strong advocates of food sovereignty, a concept that refers to localized decision-making power over food production and consumption practices. Food sovereignty in La Canoa is undergirded by the specific farming practice of agro-ecology whereby cultivation is done in harmony with the already-existing environment. In this way, the use of agro-chemicals and toxins is discouraged, as they are understood to contaminate land, air, and water, and cause illnesses in people. Conce and Juana see agro-chemicals and their associated farming practices as only bringing profits to large agri-businesses, while the small producers that use them are left in a dangerous situation of dependency on these businesses. In order to sustain these projects for food sovereignty, it is not just local and national NGO's such as CESTA and AUDESBAL that lend support, but also international NGO's based in the US and Europe, and to a lesser extent—especially with the arrival of the FMLN governments—state institutions as well. The movement participants in La Tirana and El Chile I interviewed coincided with Conce and Juana in seeing their work as communities as being extremely difficult if not almost impossible without this transnational support network.

However, there are other communities in the Bajo Lempa region that differ from La Canoa in a number of ways. The other two communities from which I interviewed movement participants—La Tirana and El Chile—seemed to be much less organized and unified in political terms, perhaps due to the fact that these communities' consist of families that migrated to the Bajo Lempa from regions all over El Salvador, as opposed to just one specific place, as in the case of La Canoa. Additionally, these communities do not primarily rely on agriculture for their

daily subsistence and food sovereignty, but rather on the abundant life that is found in the mangrove forests surrounding their communities. Here in the mangroves, inhabitants of la Tirana and El Chile are able to harvest various kinds of crabs, fish, and shrimp, which serve for both daily consumption and sale outside the community.

In these three communities, and throughout the Bajo Lempa, there is an impressive amount of environmental awareness, which should be understood as at least a partial result of the work of CESTA. As one of the first NGO's in El Salvador, CESTA began as a largely academic effort to promote sustainable technologies, but developed to focus in the contemporary context on "holistic" work for community organizing, environmental awareness, and ecologically sustainable farming practices in favor of food sovereignty. The four movement participants I spoke to exhibited impressive practical knowledge regarding the connections between the environment, and social, political and economic life in El Salvador, and attributed at least some aspects of this awareness to their interactions with CESTA.

The communities of La Tirana and El Chile have their environmental priorities focused more squarely on the mangrove forests that "give life." Their efforts for localized production and sustainability, as well as for the very life of the communities of the territory, are now understood to be in jeopardy with the arrival of the Millenium Challenge Account Fund from the United States—commonly known as "Fomilenio 2." This "innovative" aid program seeks to eradicate poverty in the coastal zone of the Bajo Lempa through investment in infrastructure projects primarily associated with large-scale, transnational tourism. For communities throughout the region however, the perceived threats of Fomilenio 2 include water scarcity and

deforestation as new hotels and golf courses occupy strategic territories and resources.⁵⁹

Pablo Diaz, the President of the community board in La Tirana, understood the more specific threat of Fomilenio 2 for those communities actually situated within, or alongside the mangrove forests, such as La Tirana to be the potential “privatization of their livelihoods.” Pablo, as well as the three men in the group interview I did in El Chile, do not trust that Fomilenio 2 will bring employment and development to their communities. Rather, they worry that their precious natural resources will be destroyed or appropriated by foreign investors who will be the real beneficiaries of Fomilenio 2.

The Politics of Divergent Logics of “Development”

In addition to concerns around the continued feasibility of community-based livelihoods based on natural resources in the mangrove forests and sustainable agricultural practices, movement participants in the Bajo Lempa, especially in La Tirana and El Chile, critique Fomilenio 2 on the grounds that they have not been directly consulted regarding its implementation. Manuel Cruz, the president of the community directive in El Chile, asserts that they are not taken into account by state institutions in general when “mega-projects” are negotiated and approved, but that the absence of their voices is even more egregious in the current situation given the direct and detrimental impacts that they will feel in their communities.

For his part, Conce in La Canoa, doesn’t even think that the FMLN, as the ruling party, is in agreement with the implementation of Fomilenio 2 but has signed off on it because they

⁵⁹ According to a report published (in Spanish) by Voices on the Border in 2014 called “Tourist Development in the Bay of Jiquilisco,” communities such as La Tirana and El Chile are among the 20% of Salvadoran communities that are still not connected to public systems of water and get their water from wells or other sources. The report provides an extensive discussion and voluminous quantitative data regarding how an influx of tourist projects, and especially of golf courses, will occupy the vast majority of the scarce hydric resources in the Bajo Lempa territory, leaving area inhabitants in even more precarious situations for securing their needs for water.

“negotiate” with the right instead of “being close to the people” which could facilitate greater political independence. Manuel professed his desire to speak directly with the members of the Legislative Assembly—“the ones who supposedly represent us and make laws in our name”—a clear demand for a community-based logic and mode of politics that privileges face-to-face dialogue with elected officials, and is perhaps antithetical to the abstracted logic of the state.

Though there have not yet been direct protests to “resist” Fomilenio 2, there have been forums and information sessions in the communities, sponsored by CESTA, ACUDESBAL and other social organizations, to raise awareness around the potential impacts of the project. In La Canoa, there seems to be a firm, united opposition according to Conce and Juana. But in El Chile and La Tirana however, “the population is divided,” according to Manuel. In these communities, some people are hoping that the development project will bring viable opportunities to the communities, and still others have already sold their land to investors, portending a vested interest in the realization of the project.

Nevertheless, a grassroots coalition of the affected communities has coalesced under the name of the Association of Mangrove Communities in Defense of Territory (ACOMADET) which is working to both raise awareness in the communities around the threats to their way of life, and present a proposal to the national government for community-based management of the mangrove forests. Though this proposal has thus far fallen on deaf ears, Manuel and Pablo speak of a growing sentiment in La Tirana and El Chile that they as communities have the right to make their own development plans and implement them. They feel that because they live there, and use the resources judiciously—with established practices regarding what species of crabs and fish to harvest in what quantities, and at what times, which are approved by the Ministry of Environment—they are already effectively managing and protecting these resources. As it is,

these are rights to management and protection that the mangrove communities enjoy through their immanent exercise. However, they feel given the threats to the resources, these collective rights to manage resources should be legally enshrined on a long-term basis. Manuel and Pablo also express the sentiment that the communities could and should be in charge of tourism—albeit at a small scale that does not endanger the surrounding ecosystems. Manuel suggests that the fact that the state will not grant these rights shows that it works for “others” and not for the poor of the Bajo Lempa.

As representatives of ACOMADET, Pablo and Manuel expressed willingness to continue organizing to foment greater resistance to Fomilenio 2, and have general plans to protest at the Presidential Palace to demand their rights to defend and manage their resources, as well as to establish a direct dialogue between the mangrove communities and the “decision-makers” behind Fomilenio 2. They profess that it has become apparent that the only way that the government will “listen” is if they begin participating in the “revindicative actions” of marches and protests. Here again we see the logic of direct dialogue and contentious mobilization that emerges from below in contrast to the centralized decision-making that descends from neoliberal state logic.

Manuel is worth quoting at length regarding how he sees the role of their community-based efforts to defend natural resources in relation to the forces that seek to appropriate the land:

...If we see who are now the owners of the beach terrains, we don't see a single peasant there, not a single fisherman, not a single egg-collector. We see wealthy men who have come from other places to appropriate this land. And when they buy the land, they promise to bring employment, but at the time of giving employment, there are other people from other places who come to work. We continue harvesting shellfish, struggling

to plant our basic crops. The Mayor came to promise us development, and to ask us to permit this development, and with the taxes that they (the investors) were going to pay, they would improve the houses and the school. But that is what we had demanded for years from the Municipal Council anyway—a project that would benefit us—because for years they have not benefitted us at all. This is the form in which the people are consulted for these development projects, but we don't see these projects as development for the community. They don't care about the natural resources, they don't care about the contamination; they don't care about the population. What are these (state) institutions there for then? Are they there to serve us as humble people who give them power in the first place?"

"...We have already been struggling for a long time. This struggle is to defend our natural resources. We want to have a community that enjoys all of its rights—that we not be marginalized by anyone. We also want to have the space—from the state institutions—to make legal demands regarding everything that is happening. We want them to hear us at a political level, because this is an injustice to not have our legality as inhabitants of a community. We have the right to that... Our lives have always been hard, but we are coming to an even more critical point—we want to struggle to defend resources for future generations... That is the example that we now want to give—that the children take care of the environment—that the young people don't contaminate and don't chop down trees, but rather take care of the mangrove forests and the beaches—the only things we have. So for us it is a satisfaction to do something that benefits the community."

Manuel's words reflect the community-based logic from below that is founded on localized ways of life, face-to-face dialogue, the exercise of rights, and in the case of the mangrove communities, the dire need to protect the environment. This logic contradicts the neoliberal state logic that sees land and natural resources as commodities to be exploited, and people as subjects to be incorporated. The struggle for the defense of resources in the Bajo Lempa also brings into sharp relief questions surrounding the FMLN and Salvadoran social movements on the left, as well as the state and neoliberalism more broadly.

First, despite Conce's perception that the FMLN does not even agree with Fomilenio 2, the party is supporting its implementation. The FMLN holds the relevant municipal governments in the Bajo Lempz movement territory, manages aligned local NGO's in the Bajo Lempa region that are advocating for communities to support the project—according to Pablo—and has complied with a series of “interventionist” conditions imposed by the US at the inter-state level. This shows how the FMLN—situated at the head of a neoliberal state—is obligated to implement policies that deepen its connections to the global economic system in hopes of attracting foreign investment that can generate economic growth, regardless of dissent from below. So on one hand, the situation in the Bajo Lempa invites us to problematize what neoliberalism is and who defines it. According to William Robinson (2003), transnational tourism is one of the four ways (along with textile assemblage, export of non-traditional agricultural goods, and export of labor and import of remittances) in which the countries of Central America are integrated into the global economy by their neoliberal states. I would contend that the only reason the FMLN does not see Fomilenio 2 as a “neoliberal” policy, is because *they* are the ones now tasked with administering a state apparatus that is structurally conditioned and restricted to implementing policies within the model of neoliberal accumulation.

In the face of this, the communities of the Bajo Lempa demand the right to critical collaboration, in the sense of calling for state institutions to authentically consult with them so that they are ultimately able to implement a community-based management of the mangrove forests with a sustainable tourism component built into that management, entailing continued collaboration with the Ministry of Environment. Thus, while the mangrove communities of the Bajo Lempa, seem to want more autonomy from the state in their exercise of a critical collaboration than the Concerta of Suchitoto, they certainly do not reject the state or its institutions. Rather, they condemn the trampling on of their exercised rights in favor of the interests of “others” such as foreign investors. Thus, there are forces that are mobilizing from below in the Bajo Lempa that could resist the implementation of Fomilenio 2, though their success is unlikely.

The Institutionalization of Citizen Participation and the Instrumentalization of Gangs

A few days after my visit to the Bajo Lempa I met with Aurora Cubias, the Director of the newly founded Secretariat of Citizen Participation of the FMLN-controlled government. After she gave me a full account of her institution’s efforts to extend the practices of consultation and participation to the farthest reaches of the country and the most forgotten sectors, I shared with her the perspectives of the people I had talked with in the Bajo Lempa. She visibly recoiled upon hearing that the communities were contemplating active resistance to Fomilenio 2. After composing herself, she agreed that there are serious contradictions inherent in the implementation of Fomilenio 2 and that not everyone in the government is in agreement with it. However, she quickly returned to her institutional discourse of citizen participation in emphasizing that the “big issue” is to figure out what “compensatory measures or options” could

be taken so that the people did not “feel so adversely affected”, and to make sure they are included “in the spaces where the operational aspects of the plan’s implementation are determined.” In this sense, even under a government of the left, a liberal rationality of political incorporation (as housed in the trending discourse of “citizen participation”) is the counterpart to a neoliberal rationality of market-led development (as expressed in the state-led development policy of Fomilenio 2) despite the palpable opposition of the local communities set to be adversely affected by the state policy in question.

Even though there may no hope of the FMLN government renouncing its intent to implement Fomilenio 2, the wealthy land investors interested in capitalizing on the program seem to be drawing on the “other” logic from below as an additional way to thwart community resistance. According to the representative of Voices on the Border in El Salvador, Jose Acosta, (who previously worked for CESTA) these wealthy investors are not only attempting to buy off community leaders and usurp lands, but have also hired gang cliques to move into communities such as LA Tirana to continue dividing the communities so that they cannot present a united front against Fomilenio 2. In this way, gang networks are not only powerful forces that curb social organizing in urban red zones, but they also have linked with agents of neoliberal state logic to stymie community organizing logic in the most rural, ecologically fragile, and economically valuable movement territories in the country.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS, QUESTIONS, AND METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

As of 2004, El Salvador was the most under-researched country in Latin America.⁶⁰ In this research project I have sought to do my part to remedy that situation by interrogating the understandings, practices, and demands of distinct social movements on the left in El Salvador's current novel context, whereby the leftist FMLN has been in control of many institutions of the state apparatus since 2009. I used the analytic frame of a movement territory to reflect my movement participants' understandings of their social and political activity, as well as to capture differences and similarities across the diverse spaces in which movements act.

In broad strokes I found that El Salvador's movements have been weakened in the post-war period by a neoliberal state logic that contradicts a community-based logic from below manifested in the historical movement traditions of community organizing, social solidarity, and militant public mobilization. Neoliberal state logic has also led to epidemic social violence, massive emigration, and NGOization of social struggle, factors which have further weakened movements on the left. But in addition, the FMLN's instrumental use of social movements has left them pacified and decapitated in the current context.

Viewing El Salvador as a social movements case study, I would follow Sprenkels in positing that the demobilization and transformation of the FMLN into a political party has produced stratification such that many in the bases are disillusioned, and wondering if "the

⁶⁰ This according to a leading Salvadoranist, Leigh Binford, co-editor with Aldo Lauria-Santiago of *Landscapes of Struggle: Politics, Society, and Community in El Salvador* (2004).

struggle was worth it.” While close articulation with the FMLN is not a static characteristic of Salvadoran social movements on the left, Sprenkels’ and my research show that war-time relations and imaginaries (or the relative lack thereof in the case of La Chacra) continue to play a prominent role in post-war opportunities and practices for movement participants on the left. Gang violence, emigration, and NGOization only complicate and weaken movement activities in El Salvador, as in other countries in Latin America and elsewhere they are prevalent.

My research uncovered a wealth of diversity amongst social movement territories on the left, suggesting not only that Almeida’s concept of social movement partyism does not adequately capture everything at play in Central American social movements, but also that movement agendas, practices, and perspectives in Central America vary by movement territory. Thus a portion of the generalizable findings of my study are conceptual and methodological in nature, encouraging scholars to engage with social movements in a territorial-historical context as opposed to through a strictly national or organizational lens. While I would contend that this research frame is certainly applicable in Central America, I would wager that a territorial lens for movements would be advantageous throughout the world.

Furthermore, in my ethnographic methodological practice I sought to take the lead of my movement participants in interrogating organizations, processes, and concepts that responded to *their* sense making. Through this endeavor, I follow Victor Rios (2011) to assert that each of my 27 (including movement “experts”) research participants can be understood as a specific case that exemplifies how specific environmental conditions shape individualized perspectives and understandings of social and political activity in contemporary El Salvador.

Finally, I hope that my work shows that the interrogation of movement participants and territories can also inform our understanding of states. I would contend that the groups and

individuals in the movement territories I researched sought to democratize the Salvadoran state while also prioritizing voluntaristic efforts to transform civil society (Bamyeh 2009; p. 72) The theory and practice of critical collaboration that emerges from the Concerta in Suchitoto and is echoed by movement participants across the movement territories I researched, posits a potentially transformative relation between civil society and the state whereby civil society is not “consumed” by the state (Bamyeh 2009; p. 85), but rather engages in pragmatic efforts of management of social projects in a horizontal relation with state institutions. In this way, Salvadoran logics from below (both in their gang network and community organizing forms) strive for dialogue and consultation with the state that occurs not on the state’s terms but rather on the terms of civil society groups. This resonates with Cesar Villalona’s call for Salvadoran social movements on the left to deploy pressure and agendas that would enable the FMLN government to “move further to the left”.

However, as Vilma in Suchitoto expressed, “It is one thing for you to be received and for them (state officials) to listen to you, but it is quite another thing for them to support you in what you are demanding.” At a deeper level, Vilma implicitly asks if it is possible for state officials to really “come down” and govern with the people, to work with civil society in a way whereby the state does not consume and stand in for civil society. Given the theorization of Scott and Bamyeh would such a relation be antithetical to the nature of the state itself? Is it really possible for states to allow civil society to critically collaborate with them based on logics of local and practical knowledge from below? Though the example of the Concerta provides a concrete example of this possibility in the field of policies oriented toward protecting women’s rights, it remains to be seen if critical collaboration is a viable option for movements in other sectors, such as the efforts of organizations in the Bajo Lempa to continue exercising their rights to a community

management of the mangrove forests given the progressive encroachment of neoliberal state logic into their territory. I would contend that at the very least, in the context of the neoliberal states of Central America, the idea of generalizing critical collaboration is inspirational, but may be difficult to reproduce beyond the realm of the defense of women's rights—though it should still be attempted.

Regardless, the movement participants of El Salvador I researched show that even in the most adverse of circumstances, the subterranean logics of community organizing and social solidarity that are embedded in historical memory, cultural representations, and contemporary movement struggles continue to inspire efforts for social transformation that bridge local, national, and transnational arenas.

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